

Professional training of Romanian civil servants in territorial administrative units

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Abstract: *Civil servants' training should represent one of the fundamental concerns of public institutions and authorities. The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the civil servants training system at the level of local public institutions. As case study we selected the territorial administrative units located in the South-West Region of Romania, Oltenia. The research uses the Kirkpatrick model to determine if the civil servants' training courses lead to increasing efficiency in their activity. The results shed light on two aspects: the limited financial resources of the local authorities which lead to allocating few resources for the training courses; the indifference of the management of public institutions towards training courses which are not considered a priority.*

Keywords: skills improvement, training courses, professionalism, performance

JEL: J31, H80, H83

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Introduction

The real value of an administrative system consists mainly in its financial and material resources, but especially in its human potential (Rammata, 2017). In today's modern society characterized by knowledge, human resources in the public sector should continuously improve their skills and knowledge (Oliveira, 2018). The economic progress is achieved by efficient decisions; that is why public administration should pay special attention to its civil servants professional training (Profiroiu et al., 2007).

Moreover, the organization's culture has a special impact on the philosophy of the staff training within public administration. The values of management and the behavioral norms specific to public managers also strongly influence the attitude of the employees towards the need for professional training

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(Androniceanu, 2019). Furthermore, a trained personnel could have a great contribution to the system's efficiency and to improving the relationship between public administration and citizens.

However, no matter how important education and development is, the practitioners in public organizations should keep in mind that not all problems and crisis in public administration's activities could be solved exclusively through professional training of civil servants (Zlatanović and Antonijević, 2008). Moreover, the professional development of civil servants cannot be reduced only to individual seminars and other types of meetings. It is a long term running process as much as participants' knowledge and formation are enhanced as well as skills are increased.

1. Literature review

Although it is extremely varied in definitions in the literature, the concept of professional training is most often regarded as a largely planned process of developing skills and knowledge among employees within public institutions (Raboca, 2010).

Profiroiu et al. (1999) defines professional training as an activity of increasing the level of knowledge and a learning process for improving professional skills and managerial performance

According to Pynes (2013), professional training refers to a planned process initiated by an authority aiming to improve employees' knowledge, skills and behavior in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their work.

In the same line, Paşa and Paşa (2008) describe the process of professional training as an informative activity carried out in order to improve and update civil servants' knowledge as well as to develop their skills for better satisfying the citizens' general interest. More specifically, Pinnington and Edwards (2000) consider that the process of employees' professional training represents a systematic and planned effort to improve their knowledge and skills through learning in order to achieve results and performance in their activities.

A similar definition belongs to Zlatanović and Antonijević (2008), considering that professional training is a systematic and continuous process that requires careful planning. It should be based on learning and practical activity in order to enable participants to acquire knowledge and skills.

While analyzing the concept of professional training in public administration, Nica and other authors (2018) mention that it is important to make a distinction between the concepts of "education" and "training" because there is an overlap of them in the current language. Thus, the training stimulates creativity and improvement of professional skills. The concept of "training" focuses on the question *how things are happening* while the term "education" has an academic connotation and provides an answer to the question *why certain things happen or should happen* (Livy, 1988).

In other authors' view (Andrei et al., 2010) the civil servants' professional training aims to: improve their skills and knowledge; help them solve problems in their field of activity; allow younger employees to achieve the best results. Moreover, according to Carrel (2000), the professional training programs should be based on a long-term strategy clearly specifying the immediate and future needs to be met.

While Muhoho (2018) emphasizes that the role training is to support and preserve human resources within the organization, Vukovic et al. (2008) argue that the training represents the essential link between the existence of a modern civil service and the professionalism of the public administration employees. In fact, professional training represents the guarantee of developing a body of competent and politically neutral civil servants.

Furthermore, from other researchers' perspective (Myers, 1986; Ciobanu, Androniceanu, 2018; Suleimenova, 2016), professional training ensures a high degree of professionalism (Ciobanu et al., 2019) maintaining high standard as regards employees' skills. The process should be addressed to the whole staff of public institutions and should be carried out in close connection with the organization's objectives (Profiroiu and Păceșilă, 2010) by taking into account the specific activity of each person involved in the training program. In addition, it should focus on developing specific skills (Katsamunska, 2016; Parkhomenko-Kutsevil, 2017; Naumenko, 2017), on building relationship with other authorities or with different categories of beneficiaries, on improving collaboration between different compartments of the institution (Sun, 2019; Severin, 2019).

2. The civil servants training system in Romania

European Union and implicitly Romania pays constantly attention to professionalization as well as to improvement of civil servants' professional performances. The modernization and efficiency of public administration to respond to economic and social challenges are key objectives mentioned in the Europe 2020 strategy (Romanian Government, 2016). Moreover, *the Strategy for Public Administration Consolidation 2014-2020* highlights the need to increase the civil service's professionalization (MDRAP, 2014).

The Romanian legal framework regarding the civil servants professional training within central and local public administration was established by Law no. 188/1999 on the Statute of civil servants (Law no. 188/1999), with subsequent amendments and completions. An important section of this law was dedicated to professional training as a right and also an obligation of the civil servants who should continuously improve their knowledge and acquire new skills and competences.

The legal basis for civil servants' attending training courses is the Government Decision no. 1066/2008 while for the contractual staff within public institutions is the Labor Code, title VI - Vocational training. As regards public managers, the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 92/2008, on the status of

the civil servant called public manager, with the subsequent modifications and completions is the normative act regulating their training.

According to Government Decision no. 1066/2008, the professional training of employees in Romanian public institutions is classified as follows:

- Training courses organized by different providers of professional training, which can be private organizations or nongovernmental agencies. At the end of the courses the attendees will receive a graduation diploma or a participation certificate. The courses can take place either at the supplier's headquarters, at the beneficiary's headquarters, or in other locations;
- Training courses carried out within public authorities and institutions, organized as internships, or as participation in different conferences, colloquiums, seminars, workshops according to the job description;
- Training courses organized and carried out in order to implement externally funded projects or European programs aimed to contribute to civil servants development;
- Other types of professional training provided by law.

The Order of the President of the National Agency of Civil Servants no. 762/2015 sets the priority areas of civil servants' professional training:

- a) Management of public services and of public utility;
- b) Public policies and strategic planning;
- c) Internal/managerial control system in public entities;
- d) Human resources management;
- e) Financial-budgetary and heritage management;
- f) Fundamental human rights and freedoms;
- g) The right of public integrity and anti-corruption policies;
- h) European Union legislation;
- i) Communication, public relations, decision-making transparency, information - public/classified/personal data;
- j) Civil procedure and administrative litigation.

According to Law no. 188/1999, public authorities and institutions are required to include annually in the budget the necessary amounts to cover the expenses of civil servants' professional training. Moreover, during the training period, the civil servants receive the salary only if: the training is carried out at the initiative or in the interest of the public institution; the courses are held at the civil servants' initiative, with the agreement of the head of the institution.

The law mentioned above also stipulates that if the professional course lasts more than 90 days in a year, regardless of whether it is organized in the country or abroad, and is financed from the state budget or the local budget, the civil servants are obliged to remain in the institution for at least 2 to 5 years after completing the course, proportional to the total number of professional training days. The public administration employees who did not complete the training course due to their fault must cover the training course expenses. In addition, the salaries received during the training course will be returned if they were provided

by the public authority.

Furthermore, public authorities and institutions must communicate annually to the National Agency of Civil Servants the professional training plan of public administration staff, as well as the funds provided annually in the budget to cover the expenses of civil servants professional training.

Currently, the training of the Romanian public administration's staff is ensured by different training providers: public institutions, independent private entities organized as commercial companies, higher education institutions, nongovernmental organizations, trade union organizations etc. (Romanian Government, 2016). Among them, the National Institute of Administration (NIA) has training responsibilities for all public administration personnel: high ranking civil servants, civil servants, contractual staff, public managers, local elected representatives, persons elected or appointed to public dignity functions or assimilated to them (OUG nr. 23/2016.).

During 2001 and 2009 NIA played an important role in the staff professional training in central and local public administration. The institute coordinated eight regional training centers for local public administration, being the only training provider for civil servants until 2006 (Romanian Government, 2016).

In 2009, in the context of public administration institutional reorganization and of the economic crisis' effects, the Institute and the regional centers were taken over by the National Agency of Civil Servants (NACS), the training activity being restricted to a specialized direction. As regards the regional centers, they became subordinated to the Agency, obtaining legal personality. The training of public administration staff has been carried out by NACS in partnership with different training providers until 2016. Moreover, NACS kept the exclusivity in organizing the training program for high ranking civil servants (INA, n.da.).

While NIA was re-established in 2016, the Direction for coordinating the regional centers as well as the regional training centers for local public administration were abolished (Romanian Government, 2017). In order to create the national professional training network, five territorial centers of training for public administration (Constanța, Craiova, Iași, Sibiu, Timișoara) were created under the subordination of NIA. They come from the former regional centers and are involved in organizing training programs for civil servants from all over Romania, seminars and conferences in the field, as well as in carrying out studies, projects and publications in the field of local public administration (INA, n.db.).

3. Methodology research

The goal of the research was to test the training of civil servants which is reflected on their efficiency at the workplace. In order to achieve the goal we have used the Kirkpatrick model. The model is based on a four levels framework, targeted for training evaluation (Kirkpatrick, 1998). In each level the assessment

of the following aspects of training is conducted:

- *Reaction*: What is the overall feedback of trained civil servants about the training?
- *Learning*: To what degree civil servants learned from the training?
- *Behavior*: To what degree learning is useful for civil servants in performing daily work?
- *Results*: To what degree the performance was improved after the training?

In the way to achieve the research goal a milestone was established: to analyze how training need analysis is done in Romanian administrative territorial units.

To conduct the research we designed a questionnaire composed of 18 questions. The questionnaire was structured in three parts. The first part extracted the socio-demographic features of the civil servants participating in the survey: gender, age, function in the institution, working environment. The second part of the questionnaire comprised questions related to civil servants training need analysis. The third part comprised questions concerning the assessment of the training and training achievements of the civil servants training programs. The items in the third part of the questionnaire were measured using a Likert scale with 5 points (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

Table 1. The structure of questionnaire

Item	Question
<i>Socio – economic and demographic factors</i>	
Age	Possible values: 25-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50-60; >60
Gender	Possible values: Male/Female
Position in the institution	Possible values: Mayor; Vice Mayor; Secretary of the city hall; Executive and management civil servants; Street level civil servants
Working environment	Possible values: Urban; Rural
<i>Training needs analysis</i>	
Training needs are correlated with job requirements?	Possible values: Yes, No, I don't know.
Civil servants are involved in training needs analysis	Possible values: Yes, No, I don't know
Which is the subject of the courses do you need for training?	Possible values: Foreign language / Negotiation and communication skills / Management of public acquisition / Project management / European Union / Writing project funding proposals / Budgeting / Financial Management / Change Management / Human Resources Management / Public Management / Anticorruption / ECDL/ Legislation

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Item	Question
Which training courses you have attended?	Possible values: Foreign language / Negotiation and communication skills / Management of public acquisition / Project management / European Union / Writing project funding proposals / Budgeting / Financial Management / Change Management / Human Resources Management / Public Management / Anticorruption / ECDL/ Legislation
<i>Assessment of training and training achievements</i>	
<i>Reaction</i>	
Overall satisfaction with training	Possible values: Strongly unsatisfied; Unsatisfied; Neutral; Satisfied; Strongly Satisfied
Satisfaction with the content of training	Possible values: Strongly unsatisfied; Unsatisfied; Neutral; Satisfied; Strongly Satisfied
Satisfaction with the training methodology	Possible values: Strongly unsatisfied; Unsatisfied; Neutral; Satisfied; Strongly Satisfied
Satisfaction with the location of training.	Possible values: Strongly unsatisfied; Unsatisfied; Neutral; Satisfied; Strongly Satisfied
The training address the professional needs	Possible values: Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neutral; Agree; Strongly Agree
<i>Learning</i>	
Achievement of the skills addressed by the training course	Possible values: Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neutral; Agree; Strongly Agree
<i>Behaviour</i>	
The use of the learnt knowledge in the daily work	Possible values: Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neutral; Agree; Strongly Agree
Support and motivation to use the new skills	Possible values: Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neutral; Agree; Strongly Agree
<i>Results</i>	
The training helped toward the achievement of personal development goals	Possible values: Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neutral; Agree; Strongly Agree
The training helped in making fewer errors and getting projects done more quickly and efficiently	Possible values: Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neutral; Agree; Strongly Agree

(Source: Authors, 2019)

4. Results and discussions

Based on the questionnaire, a survey was conducted in Romanian local administrative units located in the Romanian South-West Region, Oltenia. The sample consisted of civil servants with various public administrative functions. 131 civil servants responded that they haven't benefited from any form of training. Only 212 civil servants reported that they have participated to training courses and completed the questionnaires for analysis. Table 2 presents the demographic profile of the respondents:

Table 2. Demographic profile of respondents

Item	Possible values	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	117	55.19%
	Male	95	44.81%
Age	25-29	51	24.06%
	30-39	67	31.60%
	40-49	52	24.53%
	50-60	29	13.68%
	>60	13	6.13%
Position in the institution	Mayor	30	11.86%
	Vice Mayor	61	24.11%
	Secretary of the city hall	45	17.79%
	Executive and management civil servants	34	13.44%
	Street level civil servants	83	32.81%
Working environment	Urban	123	58.02%
	Rural	89	41.98%

(Source: Authors, 2019)

Training needs analysis

The results of the survey were disappointing. 131 (38.19%) of the civil servants implied in this research did not complete any training course. From 212 questionnaire respondents only 69 (32.54%) completed two or more training courses. Unfortunately, most of the training courses were organized in the fields of:

- Computer technology. The most of these courses were targeted to obtain the ECDL license. To this situation has contributed the fact that Romanian legislation concerning the preparation of civil servants as users of informational technologies stipulate that the courses for initiating and perfecting IT skills will follow the design of the European Computer Driving License. As the computer literacy level among civil servants was low, the National Agency of Civil Servants coordinated under the Operational Program "Development of Administrative Capacity" a project targeted to improve the IT skills of 12000 civil servants.

- Writing project funding proposals. Over the time, Romania has always been at the end of the rankings regarding the accession of European funds. The public sector hasn't been an exception. The increased needs of the town halls to absorb consistent European funds for local development led to the establishment of teams or departments specialized in writing project funding proposals. Thus, some civil servants were trained to write and implement European projects and manage non-reimbursable European funds

Some civil servants benefited by the projects coordinated by National Agency of Civil Servants. In the frame of extensive project "Implementation of training programs for public administration in e-learning system for supporting the development of information society" funded by European Regional Development Fund, training materials for 20 programs in a blended learning format were developed. The positive impact of these approach was to significantly reduce the administrative expenses by offering free courses, while trying to satisfy the needs for training of civil servants.

Anyway, few of the participants managed to attend training courses in the field they were really interested 81(38.20%). Subjects like Budgeting, Financial Management, Management of Public Services, Management of Public Acquisition, were the most requested.

The perception of correlation between training needs and job requirements is higher in the group of street civil servants (50.60%) than in the group of executive and management civil servants (44.11%).The same negative picture come up when civil servants are asked if they are involved in training needs analysis. A big percent (72.64%) responded they haven't been consulted about the knowledge they need to improve to optimum perform their daily tasks.

One reason for this gap in training need analysis is the attitude of the human resources management, for which the participation in training courses is not considered an immediate priority. The improper commitment towards training of civil servants has led to a strange phenomenon: the civil servants' participation in training courses is considered by the management of the public institutions but also by the civil servants as a reward provided to the best/best seen civil servants (Kovacs, 2003). Thus, on the one hand, civil servants leave for a holiday break in another city where all their expenses are covered by the institution where they are employed. On the other hand, the managers of the institution are satisfied that they have rewarded the reliable civil servants without using the salary fund which is quite small in comparison with the employees' needs and demands (Kovacs, 2003).

In many territorial administrative units there isn't a high decisional transparency. This fact together with the lack of information concerning the training of civil servants and the absence of an assessment of training needs can lead to serious imbalances in the proper functioning of public services.

Assessment of training and training achievements

The activity of training is carried out for different reasons and cover a wide range of needs and requirements. The essential goal of training civil servants aims to improve their level of knowledge, so that they can perform their activities in a professional and responsible manner. Self-assessment of training effectiveness plays an important role in the analysis of the newly achieved knowledge and skills.

The present research used the Kirkpatrick model to understand the effectiveness of training. As previously said, Kirkpatrick model make the analysis of the training at four levels (Kirkpatrick, 1998):

Reaction: In this level the effectiveness of training measuring civil servants attitudes and perceptions is analyzed. It highlights the feelings about training. The measure of their feelings is the satisfaction with various aspects of training.

Learning: This level analyses the degree of acquirement of knowledge, skills and attitude based on the participation in the training.

Behavior: The goal of this level is to measure if the training has led to a change in the behavior of civil servants.

Results: This level evaluates how efficient was the training in achieving organizational goals.

Table 3 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the responses related to assessment of training and training achievements.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics

Item	Mean	S.D.
Reaction		
Overall satisfaction with training	3.57	1.05
Satisfaction with the content of training	3.52	1.14
Satisfaction with the training methodology	3.74	0.72
Satisfaction with the location of training	4.11	0.63
The training address the professional needs	3.91	0.74
Learning		
Achievement of the skills addressed by the training course	4.54	0.67
Behaviour		
The use of the learnt knowledge in the daily work.	4.17	0.56
Support and motivation to use the new skills	4.27	0.63
Results		
The training helped toward the achievement of personal development goals	3.14	0.77
The training helped in making fewer errors and getting projects done more quickly and efficiently	3.26	0.78

(Source: Authors, 2019)

The mean overall satisfaction score showed that the training was satisfactory and address to a certain degree the professional needs. However, the high standard deviation highlights that there is a big difference in civil servants satisfaction. The training environment played an important role in the perception of the training quality. The materials, the topics of each course, the used methodologies and the location of training were important determinants of satisfaction, because together contributed to the creation of optimal conditions for learning.

The common belief among the civil servants participating in the survey was that they achieved the outcomes addressed by the training and they will try to use the acquired knowledge in the daily work.

Disappointing is the fact that most civil servants considered that training hasn't a great impact in achieving organizational goals. This can be explained by the fact that there is no rigorous analysis of the training needs, highlighting the lack of vision, interest and commitment of human resources managers. A reason for this situation is related to the limited financial resources of the local authorities. Although the law stipulates the duty to allocate funds in local budgets for civil servants training, these funds are not sufficient in relation to the objectives set. The organizations providing training courses to civil servants are trying to get as much money as they can from local authorities. There are also other expenses besides those related to training course participation, namely the attendees' transportation, accommodation and meal if the course is organized in another city. The expenses are exaggeratedly high in comparison with the local public budgets which quite limited (Kovacs, 2003).

5. Conclusions and research limitations

This article attempted to contribute to better understanding the civil servants' training process within public institutions in Romanian South-West Region, Oltenia. In this regard, a questionnaire-based survey was conducted, the respondents being civil servants holding both management and executive functions in local public administration. The way of identifying the priority areas for training as well as the level of participation of civil servants in training programs have been analyzed. The results showed an attitude of indifference towards the training courses and the lack of financial resources at the local level, which considerably reduces the number of civil servants participating in these courses.

As regards the limitations, the research is carried out in the South-West Region, Oltenia, one of the 8 development regions of Romania. The questionnaire was applied to 212 respondents; therefore the sample should not be considered relevant as regards the process of civil servants training within local public administration in Romania. Moreover, the results should be seen rather suggestive than conclusive for training programs in central and local public administration in Romania.

Another research limitation refers to the instrument used, the questionnaire, which contains predefined options of answer. Therefore, the respondents did not have the opportunity to express their opinions about civil servants' professional training. Furthermore, the answers obtained by applying the questionnaire could have been supplemented by an interview with representatives of each public institution within the localities belonging to the region that is the subject of this research.

Authors Contributions

The authors listed have made a substantial, direct and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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