

EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF MENTORING PROGRAMS FOR PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

A major challenge facing Romania, as a new member of the European Union (EU), is the implementation of Public Administration Reform. Among the significant supporting initiatives it can mention the project Young Professionals Scheme launched in 2003 that includes mentoring as a basic component of training Romanian public managers under this scheme. On the other hand, an extended documentary research on recent international approaches of mentoring in public sector allowed us to note a considerable gap relative to other sectors and relative to the situation of implementing government mentoring programs in EU countries and in other countries such as USA, Canada, or Australia. Against this background our paper attempts to point out why and how mentoring programs could and should be used not only as a component of initial training of public managers, but also as a current managerial practice for ensuring continuity and sustainability of the reform in Romania.

KEYWORDS: *public administration reform, civil service, public manager, mentoring, government mentoring programs*

1 Issue under Consideration and Methodology of Approach

The policy of European Union (EU) for Public Administration Reform (PAR) is based on the European principles of administration that were developed in the late 1990s within the SIGMA Programme (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management) – a joint initiative of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the EU (<http://www.sigmaweb.org/>). Therefore the EU expectations on implementing the reform by the Member States are close related to these principles. The working paper SIGMA No.44/2009 (Meyer-Sahling, 2009) explains the expectations through the notion of compatibility with European principles of administration emphasizing that it refers in the same extent to: (1) adoption of formal rules; (2) actual practices of civil service management, and (3) prevalent values and attitudes of civil servants towards these principles. „EU Regular Reports and Sigma assessments therefore placed great emphasis on the professionalisation and political neutrality of the senior civil service in the CEECs. In order to achieve the de-politicisation of the

senior civil service, European principles and EU policy aimed to reduce (and minimise) the possibilities for the exercise of political discretion over the selection and appointment of senior staff in the state administration” (Meyer-Sahling, 2009, p. 31). That is the real challenge of implementing reform for the public sector management in the new EU countries, including Romania. And, we want or not, the actual progress will be assessed relative to these expectations.

To summarize, beyond the existence of appropriate legislative framework, compatibility with European principles of administration supposes professional managers above political interests. Furthermore it is about managers able to offer real models, guidance and support for civil servants so as to assume the values and attitudes needed for ensuring effective practices of good governance validated by current democracy rules in the world and EU. In our view, a legitimate question appears within this context: how may be developed such abilities by public managers? Attempting to answer this question led us to the idea that, generally speaking, related issues of role models, guidance and support are actually the essence of mentoring programs which without having a deep-seated tradition like in USA, are of visible growing interest in the last period throughout Europe (Terwijn, 2007).

Accordingly, the issue under consideration in our paper is why and how mentoring programs could and should be used in public sector management. Methodology of approach to this issue has involved therefore an extended documentary research on existing worldwide situation of theory and practice in the field as reflected by reference literature and various initiatives of mentoring programs. Then, we focused on the current situation in Romania as resulted from official papers and reports on PAR and its supporting initiative – Young Professional Scheme, a project financed by EU aiming at attracting, training and retaining into the civil service of suitable persons as public managers. The situation was analyzed relative to the results of before mentioned documentary research, allowing us to remark some issues that we present synthetically in the next sections.

2 Review of Literature and Government Mentoring Programs

As object of interest for study, mentoring concept has made tradition within colleges and universities from United States of America (USA) and has continuously evolved but especially as a result of increasing the number and diversity of mentoring programs during the second half of twenty century. A suggestive picture about this tradition is offered in a recent project prepared by a woman researcher from Netherlands after she studied mentoring programs for youth in USA (Terwijn, 2007). In her view “Mentoring is, in fact, the realization of the American Dream. Not only do mentors personify the ideal American – a successful individual who gives back to society – they also validate the American meritocracy” (Terwijn, 2007, p. 11).

Many of contemporary theories were evolved in close relation with fields related to personal and professional development, with particular focus on improving skills for teaching and learning, entrepreneurship/business, management and leadership. Among the most referred contributions is the descriptive theory of developmental relationships (Kram, 1985) that seems remaining a referential approach almost three decades (Whitely, Dougherty, and Dreher, 1991; Ragins, 1997; Bozeman and Feeney, 2009). According this theory, mentoring is described as developmental relationships between younger and older managers to promote individual development through career stages. There are also some views emphasizing that mentoring is not only a relationship that contributes to personal growth but also an important organizational process that not necessarily depend on seniority or power (e.g. Lankau and Scandura, 2002). Since the beginning of the new millennium, mentoring is increasingly referred as support for education, for day-to-day living, and in the workplace, being now commonly understood and used as a supporting tool for learning and development at individual and organizational level (Ionică, Băleanu and Irimie, 2009). But, despite the recent increasing of research interests on mentoring potential in various areas of private sector, seems that it still rather neglected in public sector. For instance, after reviewing the literature between 1995 and 2005, Bozeman and Feeney have found that only five mentoring articles were published during this period by seven reference journals of public management and administration (Bozeman and Feeney, 2009). According to the two authors, "mentoring in the public sector can help to ease the transition between elected or appointed government officials, especially in a highly politicized environment that limits government's capacity to continue efforts across administrations" (Bozeman and Feeney, 2009, p. 142). Also they call attention to the increasing numbers of mentoring programs applied in different departments and levels of US Government.

Starting on this point, our documentary research has subsequently based on Google Search (both in English and Romanian) using key terms "mentoring programs", "government mentoring programs" and "government mentoring programs in EU". Additionally we used alternatives by replacing some words with contextual meanings, e.g. "government" with "public administration"; "mentoring programs" with "mentoring schemes" – a term that seems preferred in Europe, especially in the United Kingdom (UK). Thus, by scanning the first 100 results of each searching for "government mentoring programs" (or alternatives) we found not too many relevant results (referring precisely to such programs). And these were considerable less numerous when the search was related to EU and Romania (most of them being, in the best case, links to mentoring programs in other sectors). After reviewing a list of 862 mentoring programs included in the database of Peer Resources Network – Mentors Peer Resources (<http://www.mentors.ca>) we found that the most are mainly from USA and Canada. Only 18 programs are from European countries (UK-13; Sweden-2; Germany-1; Ireland-1; Estonia-1) and none of these is not among the few examples in government related areas (e.g. only 5 of category "Within Government").

But, even if unlisted by Peer Resources Network, we noted that many mentoring programs can be found indeed within US government departments and agencies either federal, state or local. It's likely to be a result of the initiative launched in 2001 – “Preparing the Next Generation” for addressing the demographic problem of Baby-Boomer retirements (Cal-ICMA, 2009). Also interesting, we found 29 mentoring programs currently operating within government departments of Victoria State, Australia (<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/>). Given the limited space of this paper, in table 1 we exemplify in brief five government mentoring programs.

Examples of government mentoring programs

Table 1

Brief description of program	Department/Agency
DHHS Career Mentoring Program: the mentors are senior civil servants that are matched with lower-ranked ones (on compatibility bases) to provide them career guidance, helping to increase their commitment toward institution and to a better understanding and sharing the institutional mission and values.	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
The mentoring programs of NNSA laboratories aim to retain a skilled workforce and enhance knowledge transfer from experienced employees to the newcomers. Thus, a condition of promotion for scientists and engineers at higher management levels is to act as mentors for the new staff, and another mentoring side includes the retirees to assist the transfer of knowledge that will be preserved for the future.	U.S. National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA)
NCOSP mentoring program: a Program Coordinator is designated to facilitate the matching of mentors to protégés. Considerations for matching: the request of a specific mentor by the protégé; area of knowledge of the mentor and the protégé; and geographic location of the mentor and the protégé.	North Carolina Office of State Personnel (NCOSP)
CFIA Interdepartmental mentoring program involve a mentoring relationship facilitated during 18 months, with a central coordinator who assists in matching mentors and protégés. Also it includes components of mentorship training, workshops for career orientation and development etc.	Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)

Brief description of program	Department/Agency
DHS mentoring program include among other mentoring activities for existing staff a buddy system matching new graduate recruits with a graduate recruit who joined the department the year before.	Department of Human Services (DHS), Victoria State, Australia

3 The Initiative vs. Current Situation in Romania

A major objective assumed by national strategy updated for accelerating PAR is creating and developing a professional apolitical body of civil servants comparable with those in the other Member States, particularly public managers able to act as agents of change for reform (Law No. 135/2009, Government Note of January, 2010). As a notable supporting initiative, the project Young Professionals Scheme (YPS) financed by the EU was launched in 2003 having the main objective of preparing such public managers.

The first three cycles of the YPS project have already been implemented, so as through selection and training processes were prepared 327 public managers during 2003-2008. Training is provided by the National Institute of Administration (NIA), while placements are made by the National Agency of Civil Servants (NACS). The fourth cycle differs from previous ones because it can apply to all public sector employees, including contractual staff (until now the project addressed only to civil servants and university graduates licensed in Romania). This cycle will also place a greater emphasis on assisting graduates of previous cycles to ensure sustainable networks for supporting their career development (<http://www.yps.ro>). Among the achievements of the project is mentioned and setting up the appropriate legislative framework to clarify the status of civil servants which were formed through YPS (public managers) and ensure their career development. This framework refers to some recent regulations, such as Government Emergency Ordinance No. 92/2008 (GEO No. 92/2008), Law No. 135/2009 (for approving this GEO) and the Government Note of January, 2010 concerning the norms of application (GN/J2010).

Mentoring appears as an important component of the training and development program for public managers within YPS. Under this scheme mentors are selected from the civil servants in management positions of the administrative units that host the internships. In partnership with the YPS managerial team, the mentors must prepare a result-oriented internship program within own unit and provide on this basis guidance and support to their interns (<http://www.yps.ro>). From the legislative perspective, according GEO No. 92/2008 (art. 11) mentoring is defined as a didactic activity that takes place under institutional agreement, concluded under the law, between the NIA and the authority or institution within which the mentor is employee. The mentors are civil servants in management positions which are especially appointed for exercising the mentoring activity and are entitled to remuneration for this (a minimum wage on economy per internship,

according GN/J2010, art. 40). The persons appointed as mentors by the management of a public authority/institution must be confirmed through a notification issued by NACS as meeting the conditions to be mentors (GN/J2010, art. 37).

Obviously, the YPS initiative and its achievements before mentioned are important steps towards reform. But as we mentioned in the first section, the progress assessment should consider EU expectations, meaning besides adoption of formal rules and the way of actual applying of these rules, as reflected in practices of civil service management. To edify us about the official perspective on this situation we studied the latest national report on management of civil service positions and civil servants for 2009 (NACS, 2010). We mention that data reported by NACS refer to the body of civil servants, except the ones with special status related to certain public institutions like the Presidential Administration, the Parliament, the Legislative Council, the Customs Authority, the Police and other structures of Ministry of Administration and Interior. Also, data for State Public Administration (SPA) refer to positions in central administration and territorial level (including de-concentrated services), while those for local public administration (LPA) refer to positions within county councils, local councils and other local authorities.

Based on the statistics presented in this NACS report, in the Figure 1 we synthesized evolution of management positions in civil service in Romania during the last five years, by category, in absolute and relative values. Thus, it can see: (1) evolution of the total number of management positions (MP), i.e. positions of high-ranked civil servants (HRP) and the other positions at the various managerial levels (OMP); (2) evolution in structure, i.e. MP percentage of total number of civil service positions (TP), and percentage of HRP in MP.

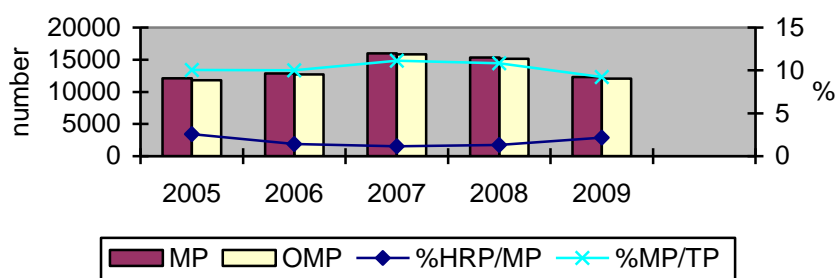


Figure 1 Evolution of management positions in civil service in Romania during 2005-2009 (primary data source: NACS, 2010, pp. 18-21)

Other data chosen for presenting here are those related to the number of notifications issued by NACS for exercising temporary vacant management positions (NeMP), by administrative levels – in central and local administration (SPA/LPA). The Figure 2 shows the evolution of these notifications in the same period, as well as their percentage of total management positions.

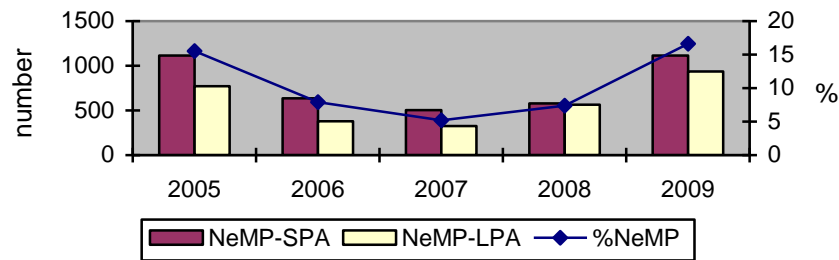


Figure 2: Notifications issued by NACS for exercising of temporary vacant management positions during 2005-2009 (primary data source: NACS, 2010)

As concerning the situation at the end of 2009, we noted the followings:

- Total number of planned positions (133.429), is a value explicitly specified in NACS report, corresponding with sum of positions structured by administrative levels but in the same time differs from value calculated as sum of positions by category – execution and management positions (133.346), also specified in report;
- Similarly, total number of occupied positions differs if we make sum by category (113.023) and if we apply the percentage of 84.70% of total planned, as specified in NACS report (112.944). This implies a difference of 79 positions, that could be explained as number of civil servants occupying the same positions in the same time;
- From the total of 133.429 planned positions (by category), around 9.23% were managerial positions (268 in HRP category and 12.054 in OMP category);
- Total number of positions with notifications (issued by NACS) for contests of recruitment, promotion, employment was 7.962, out of which: 113 in HRP category, and 1.051 in OMP category;
- Total number of notifications (issued by NACS) for exercising of temporary vacant management positions was 2.049, out of which: 224 in HRP category, and 1.825 in OMP category.

4 Concluding Remarks

By corroborating the last mentioned data taking into account and the number of YPS public managers placed into the system until the last year (as specified 327, according YPS) we see a somehow contradictory picture. Thus, only 2.68% from all managerial positions (representing 9.23% of total planned) could be theoretically of public managers formed through YPS. When we consider the situation of occupied positions (or actual number of civil servants), from total number of civil servants in management positions only 3.14% is likely to be public managers (YPS). That seems a very small percentage for the role of change agents for reform acceleration given to public managers by their official status (GEO No.

92/2008, art. 1). Moreover, the ratio between notifications for exercising management positions temporary vacant, respective the ones contests-based and the total management positions occupied suggest that only one from nine leading civil servants might be in a contest-based position, and is also likely that one from five to be in a temporary vacant position.

These contradictory data are not singular in the NACS report, and it may raise questions about how many are in fact the appointments based on political criteria (explicitly or implicitly). If we adding the many other problems of the current year, including the crisis measures of cutting civil servants wages, then we can see how is diminishing the likelihood to attract and retain professionals into the public sector, especially as public managers. That is a good reason to extend the mentoring approach of YPS type throughout the sector, adapting it after the models of government mentoring programs such as the ones referred in our paper.

To conclude, we highlighted a considerable gap in literature referring to mentoring in public sector management, relative to other sectors but also in implementing government mentoring programs in EU countries vs. other countries with a more consistent tradition in mentoring such as USA, Canada, or Australia. Thus, by discussing some of conceptual approaches and programs of reference in the countries last mentioned, as well as the YPS initiative and current situation in Romania, our paper tried to contribute in reducing this gap, both at theoretical and practical level.

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