

Innovation dans le secteur public : défis et perspectives pour les managers publics

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Résumé : Les managers publics sont des jeunes gens diplômés qui ont suivi un programme accéléré de développement en vue d'accéder au plus haut niveau de la fonction publique. Cet article met en question les résultats d'une recherche portant sur l'impact de l'activité des managers publics sur le service public. La méthodologie de recherche est fondée sur des entretiens avec les acteurs majeurs afin de connaître leur opinion sur l'impact global des

managers publics sur la fonction publique roumaine au cours des trois dernières années. Plus de 25 hauts fonctionnaires et 40 managers publics ont été interviewés utilisant à la fois les entretiens face à face et les entretiens téléphoniques.

Mots-clés : innovation, manager public, service public, défis

Innovation in the Public Sector: Public Managers Challenges and Future Prospects

Abstract: Public managers are graduated young people who passed through an accelerated development program preparing them for careers at the highest levels of the Civil

Service. Civil Service fast streamers are exposed to a range of placements in government departments and agencies and they are placed in regularly changing roles of intensive

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responsibility to prepare them for future senior managerial positions.

Methodology: Interviews with major stakeholders took place in order to find out their opinions on the overall impact of public managers on the Romanian Civil Service over the last 3 years. More than 25 senior civil servants and 40 Public Managers were interviewed using both face to face and phone interviews.

The research is the more important as the studies on the subject are almost inexistent and it approaches a group of people being in essence, policy

advisers, project leaders, experts, liaison and many other job titles all in one. Therefore, it is highly important to understand the challenges and future prospects of those Public Managers as they represent a group of people able to meet the fresh challenges that come from the rapidly changing business and political environment.

Keywords: innovation, public manager, civil service, challenges

Introduction

The YPS scheme began in 2003 with the purpose of recruiting, training and placing a fast-stream corps of young civil servants. The objective of this project is to strengthen the Romanian public administration by accelerating the development of a competent, non-political corps of professional public managers, capable of carrying forward public administration reforms and dealing with matters related to EU integration, and ensuring their retention and career development within the civil service. YPS3 is the third cycle of the kind implemented in Romania.

There are three main objectives:

- Increase management and policy capacity of the Romanian civil service by accelerating the development of a competent, non-political corps of professional managers.
- Maximise the chances of attracting and retaining high calibre individuals into the Romanian civil service by the career perspectives including fast track promotion on merit.
- Support development of legal, HRM and institutional frameworks for ongoing management of the Young Professional Scheme (YPS) and prepare Romanian institutions to assume full responsibility for YPS by the completion of Cycle 4.

Methodolgy

In present study, a variety of people in senior positions in the Romanian Civil Service were consulted for their views on the strategic impact Public Managers had on the Public Administrative Reforms over the last 4 years. We were interested to get a rounded and balanced view of the role of PMs in the reform process. We had full cooperation from everyone interviewed and they were very willing to share their ideas.

Where possible we began the interviews in the organisation with senior staff and subsequently talked to their public managers. The interviews were informally structured and where we saw a number of managers we encouraged open discussion. There was a good standard of relevant contributions from all participants.

Our objective was to obtain as wide a perspective as possible and during the interviews to focus on 3 main areas; identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the earlier cycles of YPS, considering challenges of the PMs now in post and identifying the future prospects for the next 3-5 years.

Most of the interviews were conducted on a one to one basis but we also held focus group meetings with PMs. During the interviews we encouraged the interviewees to express their views freely and we also welcomed both positive and negative feedback.

The data and information presented in this paper had been collected and processed over 25 days of structured phone and face-to-face interviews with 40 PMs from all over the country and more than 22 senior managers from different institutions (Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reform, Central Unit for Public Administration Reform, National Institute of Administration, National Agency for Civil Servants etc.) between 15th of September and 28th of November 2008. During the analysis stage we have tried to maintain the principle of using only points of view that have been expressed by more than one interviewee to maintain a consensus view.

Results

There was total agreement that PMs were having a positive effect on the Public Administration and the YPS was seen as a good scheme. These responses were largely based on the good impression made by the PMs on their senior managers and their immediate colleagues especially regarding their personal qualities such as: professionalism, commitment, productivity and time keeping. The “PM Effect” had

a positive impact on their immediate work place and set a high standard of performance. In most cases “they raised the bar”!

Despite the positive responses to PMs, when pressed for any evidence of their impact at the strategic level of the reforms, the responses were less enthusiastic. It was generally thought to be at best: sporadic, indirect, restricted to the institutional level – vertical, with limited evidence across government – horizontal, with no discernable link between YPS and PAR at the implementation level. All the responses pointed to the conclusion that after 4 years PMs had little or no impact on the highest levels of government.

According to the latest legislation (i.e. EGD 92/2008), the main role of the Public Managers is to act as a change agent in reforming the Romanian public administration. The key problems in defining the function and purpose of PMs in the recent past have arisen from many issues such as:

- the diversity of job positions and varied expectations of PMs has made an universal or common definition difficult to define in legal terms;
- the idea of a public “manager” is extremely novel and not yet fully achieved in the Romanian public administration;
- any attempt to define the job of a PM in general terms, to allow for flexibility and diversity, contradicts the traditional approach, with the problem of over-specification of the job and so failing to allow the flexibility needed;
- the encouragement of mobility of PM across different ministries or units of public administration creates additional complexity in defining the necessary attributes and indicators of achievement.

The study revealed that the institutions don’t know what the role of PM in the public administration is: a great majority (72%) answered that the institutions don’t have any idea on the role of the PMs in the public administration. Only 15% of the interviewees answered that their institutions know what was the role of PM (all of them had PMs in their institutions from the previous YPS cycle), whilst other 13% answered that the institutions partially knew what was the role of PM.

Due to the lack of knowledge and information on the role of the PMs in institutions, 47% of the PMs faced a hostile environment at arrival in institution. In the same time, 33% of the PMs considered that the atmosphere at arrival in institution was neutral, and only 20% were welcomed in the institutions (all of them in institutions that previously had PMs from the previous YPS cycle).

The good part is that, at present time, the hostile atmosphere in institutions diminished down to 5%, whilst the open atmosphere in institution increase with 8% (up to 28%) and the neutral atmosphere increased up to 67%. The qualitative part of this research showed that this increase in perception has been given by the good role

the PMs have played in the institutions. Most of the PMs have struggled so hard to create trustworthy relationship with their superior and with the other civil servants in the institutions by proving that they can fulfil complex tasks and undertake important projects, by showing that the organisation could rely on them for such activities and for delivering performance. Their colleagues finally realized that having PMs in their institution was not a burden, but a blessing for all of them.

This process of building trust and achieving recognition took between eight months to two years, depending on the type of institution, but – more often – of the relationship between the PM and his/her superior - the better the relation, the faster the integration.

Another reason for the hostile environment, was the lack of any induction activity for integrating the PMs in the organisation: 57% of the PMs stated that there were no such activities, whilst other 13% of PMs declared that they were involved in an induction process, but this process was done in an improper manner (more formally, rather than effectively – looking more to reporting the fulfillment of such activity rather than trying to help the PMs to perform better in a short time). In only 25% of the cases, the PMs were offered a proper induction programme (mainly by the PMs that were in the institution from the previous YPS cycle).

The study also revealed the way the PMs' job descriptions were made. Thus, in only 23% of the cases the job description was made as a result of a proper job analysis. In a very large proportion of cases (77%) there was no previous job analysis before producing the job description. In such cases the job description contains a mix of responsibilities taken from the PMs' job description generated in the YPS Cycle and excerpts from the legislation regarding PMs. Almost half of the PMs interviewed (49%) produced their own job descriptions. In 23% of the cases the job description was made as a result of the discussion between the PM and his/her superior (based on the generic PM's job description developed in the YPS Cycle 1), and in other 18% of the cases the job description was produced as a result of discussion between the PM and the HR Department (based on the job description designed for the PMs from the previous YPS cycle). In 3% of the cases the job descriptions were provided to PMs directly by the HR Department (those job descriptions were also based on the PM's job descriptions from the previous YPS cycle).

The responsibilities depicted in the PMs' job descriptions were too general (49%). In only 18% of the cases, these responsibilities were adapted and made specific to the job. Other 33% of the PMs declared that the responsibilities in the job description were a mix of general responsibilities with some responsibilities specific to the job.

Taking into account the poor process of designing the PMs job description there is no surprise that only 23% of them considered their job descriptions to be very useful, whilst 39% considered their job descriptions to be partially useful and 38% less useful.

Interviews with senior officers - Throughout the interviews we found a substantial degree of consistency and we list below the most commonly expressed views, beginning with those that were seen as having a negative influence followed by the positive comments.

On the negative side:

- On appointment PMs lacked the necessary level of specialist knowledge of the organisation, of the norms and of the legislation to make an instant impact;
- PMs are generalists so whilst they have a broad knowledge of public administration it is less relevant to the reality of the organisation and therefore is less valued than the so called specialist. There is a minority view expressed by some managers that generalist skills are what is lacking in Romanian public administration and therefore valuable;
- There is a continuing problem about the disparity in salaries between PMs and other civil servants. It is broadly perceived as unfair. Some managers also commented that some PMs lack professional motivation because they are more motivated by the financial reward;
- The calibre of PMs varies and so does their attitude, some have a very arrogant attitude and some have unrealistic expectations of the type of post they will be given and their responsibilities;
- In many organisations PMs are doing exactly the same work as civil service colleagues and lack in-depth practical experience. They have sound theoretical knowledge but need more implementation skills;
- Many managers stressed the need for better information about the role of PMs, of how to use them effectively and also better publicity of the scheme; there is still large-scale misunderstanding amongst staff;
- Some managers felt the PMs should be trained in better “office skills” including practical IT programmes such as databases and drafting skills.

On the positive side:

- PMs do generally possess knowledge and skills in certain areas that are lacking in the wider workforce e.g. structural funds and public policy;
- The most valued PMs are those who have a public administration background or a professional/academic specialization for the organisation e.g. a relevant degree in Environment;
- The majority are employed in areas such as policy or fund management where they are perceived as capable and effective by colleagues and managers and have been accepted in the organisations;
- Employing a PM is seen as a “reliable option” as organisations know they will get a well-trained member of staff. The YPS training programme is respected by

managers as it is comprehensive and relevant, despite the generalist / specialist debate;

- PMs are seen as well-prepared and quick learners;
- Better results are achieved when managers have a good relationship with their PM and there is a climate of trust and thus given greater responsibilities;
- Most PMs are seen as being positive and pro-active and willing to share their experience and knowledge.

Interviews with Public Managers - We also found the same degree of consistency in the information given to us by PMs. We focused more on PMs experience of their first posting i.e. what knowledge or information was lacking or helpful and what their current training and development needs are. The most commonly expressed views are represented below in 3 categories:

Training Period:

- Their YPS training had been valuable; it provided them with a broad based knowledge and understanding of the public sector and an appreciation of subjects such as policy and project cycle management that were new to them. More and better practical information would have been appreciated;
- For the trainees many said the EU stage had been the most useful of all since it provided a real experience of how public administration was run;
- For the scholar entrants the knowledge and skills gained during their Masters programme had not really been applied in their current posts, when questioned about the relevance most responded that they were able to use around 10% of what they learned with one scholar saying it was 60% and in the worst case 0%;
- Their experience of the stages in Romania were mixed with a few good examples and many poor experiences of being left on their own or just given large amounts of reading matter without much explanation. The best stages had a connection to either the subject matter currently being studied (during YPS training) or to the participants' own interests and where there was a real involvement or a good mentor;
- The most useful subjects in the training were generally seen as: strategic management, project cycle management, EU affairs and HRM. All agreed that they would have liked further practical training especially in the subjects described above;
- The Trainers were considered very important by all interviewees and the ability to make subjects interesting and provide subject expertise was highly valued. Most preferred practitioners who could give real experiences from the public sector and thought the use of training strategies such as case-studies, simulations, role-play and practical group exercises were the best learning experiences;
- Most PMs saw a clear need for some personal development training during the YPS programme although described it in various ways. It should cover such

topics as: team working, stress management, how to present ideas, negotiation and influencing skills.

Following placement:

- There was a clear lack of any planned induction period once they were appointed. Most PMs wrote their own job descriptions and some graduates from Cycle 1 even had had to find a role for them. Many agreed that the situation had improved and those from Cycle 2 realised they had benefited from the existing PMs. Where there were PMs already in the organisation they often took on the (unofficial) role of mentor and this was seen as an improvement;
- Some PMs identified that there had been an “attitude” problem in their organisations with individual PMs and this they saw as a reflection on the whole cohort and had caused friction and in some cases led to difficulties for them;
- The attitude of their senior managers was critical and impacted strongly on their work environment and more was achieved. Many PMs thought they worked more efficiently and produced more than other colleagues but most worked well with others and appreciated their experience. There had been some conflicts with managers who did not accept the PM scheme;
- Many PMs reported a tendency in their organisation to give “extra” or “unwanted” jobs to PMs on the basis that they were the ones with “big salaries” so should earn them;
- Very few PMs felt that they had had a chance to do what they felt they had been recruited for i.e. help change in the public sector. Many said it was difficult to get their ideas considered and most reported that change was not seen as desirable/necessary in their organisations but some said they had made small improvements that were useful.

Future development:

- Very few PMs had received any real development, some had had an opportunity they saw as developmental but those experiences were few. Training and development was ad hoc with many PMs attending training courses, some at INA or others through project technical assistance. Most of the training courses were vocational or specifically linked to subject area e.g. structural funds. Many had attended Training of Trainers courses as a way of developing themselves. Any training had to be researched and initiated by the individual;
- Many PMs from Cycle 1 had been in the same post for 3 years and were still doing the same work although some had been given further responsibilities. They are now at the top of the PM scale of promotions range. Other PMs had wanted or been forced to transfer and in these cases where it was voluntary most had found another post through their own efforts; a small number had been re-assigned in very difficult circumstances.
- Other factors highlighted by interviewees were the disparity in remuneration between regular civil servants and PMs. This was an issue particularly when PMs were performing the same tasks as their counterparts but being paid much more. The

root cause of this resentment was the lack of suitable posts for PMs to perform tasks where they could apply their newly acquired skills and knowledge. Consequently, as these posts are not challenging enough for PMs, this has affected their motivation adding frustration to an already fraught situation.

As mentioned above, PMs are often criticised for their lack of technical knowledge of the organization and the functions of the Public Administration in general, when they are posted to line ministries as an additional resource. We were told that PMs needed to be more specialised and better informed on how the Public Administration operated.

Also, according to the legal provisions, PMs are directly subordinated to the highest civil servant. In practice however most do not have a direct line to the General Secretary but work within a Directorate under the coordination of their respective Director. Some PMs were uncomfortable taking instructions from a Director rather than the Secretary General and equally some Directors were not happy to manage a PM who might be earning much more than themselves.

Conclusion

The role of PMs in the Romanian public administration is still confused. Despite the latest attempts (EGD 92/2008), the difficulty of finding a place for PMs in institutions is given especially by the lack of defining the PMs' role in institutions. As a result, the institutions find difficult to understand the role and functions of the PMs. In the same time, the rate of producing PMs went faster than the perceived need for such change agents in institutions.

The PMs' job definitions are far from being the change agents involved in modernizing the public administration (as intended and stated in the legislation). The process for designing the PMs' job descriptions in institutions lacks a proper understanding of their role and a proper job analysis. The institutions usually don't know what types of responsibilities to make for the PMs.

In a large percentage, the job descriptions are made as general as possible. One explanation for such generality is given by the fact that, not knowing what they will do tomorrow, the PMs need to leave room for new responsibilities that could fit in their general responsibilities. Another explanation comes from the fact that, being desperate to find a place in institutions that (at least, initially) don't care too much of them, they tend to accept responsibilities that do not fit with their role as described in the legislation. More often, the PM is forced to be more an assistant/ a secretary for his/her superior rather than a change agent in institution.

There is a lack of proper systems for integrating the PMs in the public administration i.e. lack of information about their role, lack of induction process,

lack of mentoring process, lack of strong contact with the superiors at right level in institutions, lack of proper and effective performance appraisal system, lack of career planning and development.

The full potential of the PMs who have already graduated has yet to be realised. Our questions elicited evidence that PMs were not getting enough experience of dealing with horizontal issues related to reform. They were allocated to posts in PPU, PIU and CFCU which gave them some limited exposure to cross ministry issues. Time spent in these Units was beneficial to their development but it was counter productive if they stayed in these units for too long. PMs are meant to be mobile and flexible so as to gain the maximum experience.

We were concerned that hardly anyone mentioned the need for PMs to fulfil the role of future leaders fast tracking to senior management positions. We were given a lot of feedback on the need for PMs to have line management experience. In particular, the current and next generation of PMs should have practical experience at middle management level.

The PM is not a necessarily a specialist in certain field of activity, but a generalist that should radically change and improve the system. They need to be involved in important reform projects as project managers that could co-ordinate multi-task teams for implementing reforms in the public administration.

The public administration need to create appropriated positions for PMs in order to place them in positions where their impact on reforming the system could be maximized. In order to play the role of change agents, the PMs should be placed in key areas such as: strategies and public policies, project management, control and audit, HR, communication & PR. Placing them in such key areas will not be enough without getting them access to proper resources and given them the right authority to address the rotten issues in public administration.

New HR and managerial system should be designed and implemented for integrating the PMs i.e. induction process, mentoring process, designing proper and strong contacts with the superiors at right level in institutions, proper and effective performance appraisal system, effective career planning and development. For doing that, there is an acute need for designing proper Guides for: job analysis, integration, mentoring, career planning and development. The performance appraisal system should be much improved in order to allow the PMs to exchange information with their superior, to receive feedback on performance and to agree the future objectives based on a proper appraisal interview. In the same time, there is an acute need for informing and promoting their change agents role in public institutions. The MIAR should find resources and use all the communication channels to promote the PMs' role in public administration, especially when

meeting with high ranking civil servants (conferences, seminars, workshops, training sessions etc.). The attitudes and openness of the high ranking civil servants is fundamental in faster integrating the PMs in institutions. Their superiors should see them as a very useful resource and adviser, rather than just another type (well trained) of civil servant.

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