MENTORING IN PUBLIC MANAGEMENT: CONCEPTUAL AND PRACTICAL APPROACHES AT THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

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ABSTRACT: *The paper aims to highlight the important role that mentoring can play for public sector management in general, and for implementing Public Administration Reform in Romania in particular. An extended documentary research of recent international literature and practices that address this topic allowed us to observe a considerable gap relative to the approaches of mentoring in management of other sectors. Moreover, a gap appears also if when comparing the situation of implementing government mentoring programs in European Union countries and in other countries with a more consistent tradition in mentoring such as USA or Canada. Thus, by presenting some conceptual models and programs of reference in the countries last mentioned, our paper tries to contribute in reducing this gap, both at theoretical and practical level.*

KEY WORDS: *mentoring; public management; reform; referential models.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *H83; I28; I29; D73.*

1. INTRODUCTION: THE BACKGROUND

One of the major challenges facing the transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) that became members of the Europe Union (EU), including Romania, is the implementation of Public Administration Reform (PAR).

The reform is based on the European principles of administration aiming at democratic and effective governance throughout EU. These principles 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 (Meyer-Sahling, 2009). They were conceived taking into account of a whole range of models and traditions of public

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administration, so that the framework of reference for reform „is compatible with the new public management as well as with the classic Weberian administration; it fits a Scandinavian tradition of administration as much as a Germanic, Anglo-Saxon or Napoleonic tradition" (Meyer-Sahling, 2009, p. 12). Thus, the EU approach to policy of PAR is built on "a mix" of principles reflecting the international developments of conceptual models as well as the good governance practices with tradition in Europe. The main groups of principles are: (1) rule of law: legality, reliability and predictability; (2) openness and transparency; (3) legal accountability; (4) efficiency and effectiveness (Meyer-Sahling, 2009).

It is obvious that the policy of PAR in Romania was aligned with the EU approach described before. One of commitments assumed within the national strategy updated for accelerating the reform refer to creating a professional apolitical body of civil servants comparable with those in the other Member States, with particular focus on developing public managers able to act as a change agent for reform. (GEO No. 92/2008, Law No. 135/2009, Government Note of January, 2010). But, we want or not, the actual progress will be assessed relative to the EU expectations on this matter. For instance, in SIGMA Paper No.44, which examines the current state of civil service reforms in the eight CEE countries (CEECs) that joined the EU in 2004, these expectations are explained through the notion of compatibility with European principles of administration. Thus is clearly pointed out that this refers in the same extent to: (1) the adoption of formal rules; (2) the 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). Considering that the term "senior civil service" may be understand through a more familiar and well-established term in management theory and practice - „top management", we can see the real challenge of expectations related to the public managers.

On this background, our paper attempts to point out why and how mentoring could and should be used in public sector, not only as a component of initial training of managers (enabling them to deal the challenge and meet such of expectations), but also as a managerial practice (for ensuring the continuity, or the reform sustainability).

2. CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES: REFERENTIAL MODELS FOR PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AND MENTORING

The modern public sector was developed in the second half of the 19th century within the industrialized countries having as conceptual foundation the well known model of Weber's bureaucracy (classic model). On this foundation evolved the bureaucratic model (BM) basically building on a bureaucratic regulatory function and a system of values with two main pillars, i.e. the long-term service and relevant work experience (Levente, 2007).

A new development stage emerged at the beginning of the 1980's. According to Levente "within the framework of the New Public Management (NPM) - which basically involved emphasizing business solutions and efficiency - comprehensive reform programmes began to be introduced in several English-speaking countries (the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, the United States of America and Canada). These efforts provided both a model and experience valid also in those European countries embarking on their transformation" (Levente, 2007, p. 7). This view is consistent with those reflected in many other papers of the international literature (e.g. Pollitt, 1995; Christensen and Laegreid, 2001; Green-Pedersen, 2002; Pollitt, van Thiel and Homburg, 2007). Also, it was validated by empirical proofs like the OECD reports on progress of administrative reforms in the Member States at the time (e.g. OECD 1990, 1995). They all confirm a trend of convergence in introducing the concepts of NPM, meaning the adoption of business management ideas and techniques to reach higher level of quality service, client-orientated, thus implementing the new competitive market mechanisms in public administrations of the Western developed countries. A relevant synopsis of the model is offered by Pollit et al. (Pollitt, van Thiel and Homburg, 2007) which state that NPM implies:

- more decentralization (by separating policy and administration or by the use of divisional structures);
- more contractual relationships instead of traditional hierarchical controls;
- new market-type mechanisms (like vouchers, competitive tendering and outsourcing);
- more attention for public managers and their management skills;
- new management techniques for the public sector like human resource management, benchmarking and results orientated planning and control.

In the latest years, a new model seems to evolve to refine NPM. It can remark an increasingly attention to issues such as establishing dynamic relations with civic society and the private sector, raising society's assumption of responsibilities, significant participation of citizens in decision-making and expressing their views on the public service performance (Welch and Nuzu, 2006). The new stage called by Levente „Adaptive Model" (AM) focuses on shaping a common value, mainly facilitated by:

- the various stakeholders;
- the harmonious and constructive co-operation between public-and private sectors (public-private partnerships);
- the concepts of citizen as key customer, responsive governance, openness and transparency;
- normalising the legal status of public servants.

Obviously, the emergence of a public service which might be termed "complying-optimising" is linked with the spread of the notion of responsive governance, which consider the demands of various stakeholders (Levente, 2007).

Looking to the course of evolution in Romania comparative with that described previously as being typical for Western developed countries, it is a clear lag regarding the period of passing-through the stages corresponding to the public management models of reference (Fig. 1).

The root cause for adopting later of NPM in Romania is the well known history of its long standing tradition in a communist type administration based on centralized state control. Thus in our country were launched reform initiatives following the guidelines and basic principles of NPM only since the end of the 90's. For instance, the strategy for accelerating PAR (adopted in 2001) has established as key goals creating a new legislative framework, providing highly professional public service, institutional modernization, developing a citizen-oriented administration. This strategy was subsequently updated so as to meet the specific terms of accession to the EU. However, the current course of events shows that we are far yet of expected results, especially as concerning the de-politicization and professionalization of the civil service.
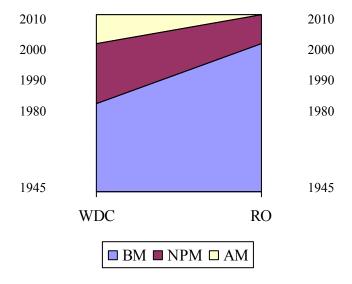

Figure 1. Evolution of public management models - Western developed countries (WDC) vs. Romania (RO) (adapted from Levente, 2007, p. 9)

This is precisely that point where mentoring may prove useful for public management, as revealed in the recent literature. Thus, according to Bozeman and Feeney, "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). Based on a critical review of the mentoring literature, the two authors emphasize the scarcities of published papers that address the particular issues of mentoring in the public sector context (i.e. by scanning seven major journals in public administration and public management they found only five mentoring articles published between 1995 and 2005).

The general meaning of the mentoring concept (seen by many authors as having its roots in the well-known "Odyssey" of Homer) has acquired new valences over time. In the contemporary developments, many of the conceptual approaches of

mentoring were in relation with areas such as career development, management, leadership, study skills, teaching and learning. After the year 2000 the concept becomes more and more explicitly addressed as: (1) support for education; (2) support for day-to-day living; (3) support in the workplace (Ionică et al., 2009). Therefore mentoring is usually understood and used today as a supporting tool for learning and development both at the individual and organizational level.

Among the most referred contributions in the contemporary literature of mentoring in business sectors we find the descriptive theory of developmental relationships (Kram, 1985) that seems remaining a referential approach almost three decades (Whitely, Dougherty, and Dreher, 1991; Ragins, 1997; Ragins et al., 2000; Bozeman and Feeney, 2009). According this theory, mentoring is described as developmental relationships between younger and older managers that promote individual development through career stages. There are also some nuanced views emphasizing organizational implications of mentoring. For instance, Lankau and Scandura describe mentoring not only as a relationship that contributes to personal growth but also as an important organizational process that not necessarily depend on seniority or power (Lankau and Scandura, 2002).

Focusing on the public sector, Bozeman and Feeney develop a result-oriented mentoring approach (see table 1), named by the authors "three-tier model of mentoring outcomes" (Bozeman and Feeney, 2009, p.144).

Table 1. Three-tier model of mentoring outcomes

Mentoring Outcomes (MO) - levels:		
Organizational	**Individual**	**Public Service**
Improving quality of the Human Capital (HC) of organization	Improving Individual HC	Improving capacity (Portable HC)
Increasing vertical mobility in organization	Increasing career & job opportunity	Opportunities for diverse groups in Society
Enhancing organizational commitment	Enhancing career motivation	Enhancing public service motivation

Source: Adapted from Bozeman and Feeney, 2009, p.144

In the authors view, the three sections of outcomes at the level „Public Service" (third column of table 1) reflect three key features of public sector that make difference relative to the private sector, as follows:

(1) Interdependence (corresponding with MO related to improving capacity/portable HC) - it refers to the fact that public agencies are interconnected in ways that private organizations are not, i.e. by common personnel systems and rules, common purchasing procedures, similar processes of budgeting and accounting. Therefore, is expected to collaborate to share the good practices and knowledge leading to improving overall institutional capacity. Mentoring enables sharing informal institutional knowledge "that resides in individuals but not in personnel manuals, thus preserving institutional memories and intrinsic knowledge" (Bozeman and Feeney, 2009, p. 136);

(2) Opportunity structure (corresponding with MO related to increasing opportunities for demographic and social groups of Society) - it refers to the fact that government agencies have historically a distinctive role in ensuring equal opportunity. As a support of career development, mentoring combines the opportunity of advancing for civil servant with the need for leadership in public management, offering equal opportunity no matter of appurtenance to one social group or another;

(3) Public service motivation (corresponding with MO related to enhancing motivation) - it refers to the "public service ideals" that have (or should have) a central role in public management. Mentoring can give a greater understanding and sharing of these motivational values, leading to their actual use for enhancing individual and institutional commitment towards public service quality and performance.

In their attempts to argue the need of developing a theory of public management mentoring (PMM), Bozeman and Feeney refer also to the increasing numbers of mentoring programs applied in different departments and levels of US Government. In the next section we make a brief overview of practical approaches of mentoring that are materialized through such programs.

3. PRACTICAL APPROACHES: MENTORING PROGRAMS

In our documentary research we based on Google search (both in English and Romanian) using key terms such as "mentoring programs", "government mentoring programs" and "government mentoring programs in Europe Union". In addition we used and alternatives obtained by replacing some words with contextual meanings (e.g. "government programs" with "public administration programs"; "mentoring programs" with "mentoring schemes" - a term that seems preferred in Europe, especially in the UK). The main rationale for using alternatives terms was to verify the preliminary results that indicated a clear difference between the number of results by the type of programs, and location of source (USA & Canada vs. EU countries, including Romania).

Thus, searching for "mentoring programs" in English had over 6.5 million results while in Romanian were only about 34.000 results. But the number of results is significantly reduced when searching for "government mentoring programs" (i.e. about 5.1 millions in English and around of 2100 in Romanian) and especially after searching for "government mentoring programs in Europe Union" (only about 58000). Using of the alternative terms do not had considerably influenced these results meaning that the difference (as size order) is maintained while number of results is further reduced (e.g. around 27.000 results for "government mentoring schemes in Europe Union").

What is more important, by scanning the first 100 results of each searching for government mentoring programs (or alternatives) we found not too many relevant results for us (that referring precisely to such programs). Moreover, these were less and less when the search was related to EU and Romania (most of them being, in the best case, links to mentoring programs in other sectors). For instance, we found an extensive database of mentoring resources (Peer Resources Network - MENTORS PEERS RESOURCES) that includes a section of "mentoring programs listings" which exemplify over 860 programs applied in different organizations and sectors

(http://www.mentors.ca). By reviewing the list of 862 programs we found that only 18 are from European countries (UK-13; Sweden-2; Germany-1; Ireland-1; Estonia-1). None of these programs is not among the few examples covering government related areas (e.g. only 5 of category "WITHIN GOVERNMENT"). As expected, the most are mainly from USA and Canada. In table 2 we present three examples of government mentoring programs.

Table 2. Examples of government mentoring programs

Brief description of program (Agency/Institution)
Career Mentoring Program: mentors are civil servants in management positions that are matched with civil servants of lower-ranked to provide them career guidance, helping to increase institutional commitment and to a better understanding of institutional mission and values and sharing them. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - DHHS 2005)
The mentoring programs of NNSA laboratories aim to retain a skilled workforce and enhance knowledge transfer from the experienced employees to the new hired ones. Thus, scientists and engineers at higher management levels must act as mentors for the newer staff (this being a condition of their own promotion), and another side of mentoring includes the retirees to assist in the transfer and archive of knowledge that will be preserved for the future. (U.S. National Nuclear Security Administration - NNSA, 2005)
Interdepartmental mentoring program of Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) includes an 18 month facilitated mentoring relationship; a central coordinator who assists in matching mentors and mentees; mentorship training for all participants; workshops for career orientation and development, etc. (CFIA)

We must mention that despite the small number of government mentoring programs (GMPs) listed by Peer Resources Network, the US Government has many other similar programs at Federal, State and local level. It is a result of the Preparing the Next Generation (PNG) initiative that was launched in 2001 aiming to prepare, develop, and motivate the next generation of US government workers (Cal-ICMA, 2009). The rationale for such an initiative is the US demographic problem generated by Baby-Boomer retirements, since according official estimations „53 percent of all government workers at federal, state, and local levels are eligible to retire in the next three to five years" (Cal-ICMA, 2009, p. 2). Thus, the current demographic problem and the long-standing tradition of mentoring programs in USA can explain our findings concerning the greater number of GMPs, comparative with the EU.

However it is important to note that during the last years it can see a tendency of spreading mentoring programs in the EU countries, especially in educational and business sectors. Given the space limited for this paper we present below just the specific initiative found in Romania related to the project Young Professionals Scheme (YPS), project financed by the EU.

The YPS project was launched in 2003 aiming to support PAR in Romania through selecting, training and attracting some of the best Romanian graduates into the civil service. The first three cycles of the project have already been implemented under the Phare 2001, 2003 and 2005, so as through selection and training processes were prepared 327 public managers during 2003-2008. The fourth cycle started at December 8, 2008, and aims further selection, training and placing in key administrative

structures of around 120 graduates, in addition to the ones already placed after the previous cycles. 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). Therefore, we can say that YPS is one route to becoming public manager - the title currently conferred on the graduates of the scheme when they enter the civil service. Mentoring is seen as an important component of the training and development program for public managers within YPS. Mentoring of the trainees during their internship and mentoring of the public managers during the early years of their career are two sides of the same problem, meaning to find best way through that trainee/public manager is enabled to learn quickly and with reduced risk, while is placed in a relatively unfamiliar environment (Profiroiu et al., 2007). Mentors are selected from the civil servants in managerial 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.

Among the achievements of the project is mentioned 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 (http://www.yps.ro). It's about 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) which were already referred in the introductory section of the paper. But, for the purpose of this section, we consider important to note some issues arising from these regulations related to the mentoring approach. Thus, according GEO No. 92/2008 (art. 11) mentoring is considered 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 legal conditions to be mentors (GN/J2010, art. 37), i.e.:

- to have a minimum level of knowledge concerning the goal and objectives of training program, as well as specificity of public manager function;
- to know objectives of the institution to which it belongs and how these may be correlate with the activity of its department and with setting individual objectives of the staff, or coordinating them (if the case);
- to be willing to carry out the coordination of trainees in internship, so as to facilitate a better integration of them into the work team and their involvement, as possible, in achieving department objectives.

4. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION: DISCUSSING THE CURRENT SITUATION IN ROMANIA

According to the latest national report on management of civil servant positions and civil servants for 2009, the main directions for action in this field as resulted from chapter 22 (PAR) of Governance Program 2009-2012 refer to: (1) administrative decentralization, (2) human resources management and (3) raising the efficiency and transparency of the administrative act (NACS, 2010, p.5). Based on the statistics presented in this report of the National Agency of Civil Servants (NACS, 2010), the Figure 2 shows the number's evolution of civil service positions (CSPs) in central and local public administration from Romania during the last five years. 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, it must note that data for central public administration (CPA) refer to positions at the State and territorial level (including de-concentrated services), while those for local public administration (LPA) refer to positions from county councils, local councils and other local authorities.
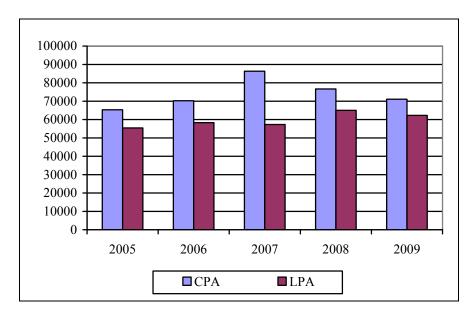

Figure 2. Evolution of the number of civil service positions in Romania during 2005-2009
(primary data source: NACS, 2010, pp.18-19)

As concerning the structure of CSPs by category of civil servants, it can see that at the end of 2009 were 133.429 planned positions, out of which 268 high-ranked civil servant positions (HRP) and 12.054 management positions (MP), others than HRP. Therefore, the leading positions (HRP+MP) were around 9.23% (see table 3),

while only 2.68% from these positions may be theoretically of public managers formed through YPS.

Table 3.

Specifications	Values
Number of CPSs - total planned, out of which leading positions (LP):	<u>133429</u>
HRP	
MP	268
	12054
Number of CPSs - total occupied, out of which LP:	<u>113023</u>
HRP	50
MP	10243
Number of unoccupied CPSs - total resulted, out of which LP:	<u>20406</u>
HRP	18
MP	1811
Number of notifications (issued by NACS) of contests for recruitment, promotion, employment, - total, out of which LP:	<u>7962</u>
HRP	113
MP	1051
Number of notifications (issued by NACS) for exercising of temporary vacant* LP - total, out of which:	<u>2049</u>
HRP	224
MP	1825

When we consider the situation of occupied positions (or actual number of civil servants), from total number of civil servants in LP (HRP+MP) only 3.14% is likely to be public managers (YPS). That seems a very small percentage for the role of change agent for reform acceleration! Moreover, the ratio between notifications for exercising LP temporary vacant, respective the ones contests-based and the total LP 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.

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