

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL OF CIVIL SERVANTS IN THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION OF ROMANIA

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Abstract: *The present paper analyzes the model of performance appraisal of civil servants in the public administration of Romania, identifies the limits of this model and suggests ways for improving it.*

Key words: *performance, appraisal, government, employees, Romania*

1. INTRODUCTION

Performance is a broad concept with various meanings for various audiences in various contexts (Kouzman et al. 1999). The literature contains numerous approaches on this concept. Performance in the public sector, as defined by OECD, is “the ability of a government organisation or authority to acquire resources economically and use those resources efficiently (input-output) and effectively (output-outcome) in achieving the output and outcome targets or goals” (Ketelaar et al., 2007).

The definition of “performance measurement” poses difficulties, too. The literature comprises several different definitions of “performance measurement” in the public sector, explained by Greiling (2006). Firstly, in a narrow sense, the term refers to the process of applying various techniques for generating qualitative and quantitative performance data. Secondly, performance measurement may refer to performance reporting, considered to be a control and monitoring tool. Third, performance measurement is more and more seen as a steering instrument. Our research is mainly conducted in accordance with the first approach.

The introduction of a performance measurement system in the public sector is in accordance with the “new public management” (NPM) trend (Šević, 2005). According to this trend, the traditional bureaucratic model of public service (currently present in Romania, too) is to be gradually replaced. The administration should be focused on performance, oriented towards the citizens (the “clients”), and should have enhanced flexibility, strengthened accountability and control, as well as increased capacity for developing strategy and policy.

On this background, the researchers’ end objectives are to develop and test an enhanced model for performance measurement in Romanian public sector entities. The purpose of this model is to contribute to increasing the performance of this category of entities and the quality of the services provided by them, in the spirit of the previously described “new public management” trend.

This paper presents a part of the first results of this broader research. It focuses on a subset of public sector entities, namely those from the public administration and on a category of performance, namely that of human resources. The research leads to the improvement of the model for performance appraisal of civil servants working in the Romanian public administration. Methodologically, the research steps were: analysis of the main traits of the model; identification of the model’s weaknesses; review of the main international perspectives on this topic; and proposals for the improvement of the model.

2. PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL OF CIVIL SERVANTS IN ROMANIA

In the Romanian literature, there is an increased interest for performance measurement in the public sector, especially in the context of the current financial and economic crisis (Ștefănescu, 2009). The current section presents the model for individual performance appraisal in the Romanian public administration.

National regulations (Government Decision no. 611/2008) set the methodology for measuring the individual professional performance only for civil servants. The reason is that human capital is the main factor of performance creation in public administration entities. The appraisal of civil servants in Romania is performed annually and answers two questions: to what extent the individual objectives set in the job description were attained, and to what extent were the performance criteria achieved.

Performance criteria are selected depending on the characteristics of the activity. These criteria are: implementation skills, ability to solve problems efficiently, ability to assume one’s responsibility, capacity of self-perfection and making use of the gained experience, capacity of analysis and synthesis, creativity and initiative, capacity to plan and act strategically, ability to work independently, ability to work in a team, and competence in managing allocated resources.

Civil servants are classified at national level, depending on their education level: class I comprises civil servants with long-term higher education; class II – civil servants with short-term higher education, and class III – civil servants with high school level education. For each category of civil servants, the performance criteria are explained slightly differently. Moreover, depending on the characteristics of the public institution and the activities performed by the civil servant, that institution can establish other performance criteria. The appraisal procedures comprise, in accordance with the GD no. 611/2008, the following steps: filling in the appraisal report, interview, and countersigning the appraisal report.

The analysis of this performance appraisal model points out its limits: there are criteria for performance appraisal exclusively for civil servants; the appraisal is subjective; there is no correlation between professional performance of civil servants and the quality of services offered to citizens; conciliation of divergences between the civil servant and the assessor affects the objectivity of performance appraisal; the qualitative nature of the criteria and the lack of explicitly defined indicators generate subjective interpretations; neither of these criteria contain the words “performance”, “result”, “cost”, “quality”; there are no criteria for assessing performance by citizens, as final consumers, or by tax-payers, as well as other external collaborators; managing financial resources and materials allocated is not a comprehensive criteria for performance appraisal.

3. PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL OF CIVIL SERVANTS AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

In order to properly analyse the system of performance measurement in the public sector of a certain country, it is first of all necessary that the public policy, the political processes and its administrative structure are understood (Šević Ž., 2005). Moreover, the external factors and the country's interactions with other countries and international bodies can directly or indirectly influence the system of performance measurement of the entities in the public administration, in general, and of the human resources of these entities, in particular. Due to the complexity of these factors and the specificity of each country, a comparative study between Romania and other countries is difficult to carry out and, to a certain extent, not feasible due to comparability issues.

However, the analysis of each national performance measurement system used in the public administration is, in the authors' opinion, salutary for identifying models and practices regarding performance measurement that can be adapted and implemented in the Romanian space, too. For instance, a broader research carried out under the auspices of OECD analyses the representative cases of some countries, chosen precisely because of their differing characteristic features in the field of performance measurement systems, respectively: Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Netherlands, U.K., U.S. etc.

Authors analysed the results of that research carried out at international level (Ketelaar et al. 2007) and used it for comparison with the situation at national level. Of interest were the performance measures. This international research shows that performance is to be measured depending on certain objectives from the single results area (such as policy goals, input usage per policy goal) or from the business processes area (such as: promoting/preserving values, leadership effectiveness and impact, facilitating learning and change management etc.). In the single results area, the measures may be: resources used, delivered products and services, their quality, goals achieved (intermediate and final outcome). In the business process area, the measures taken into consideration are legal responsibilities complied with, strength of governance and leadership, quality of work relationships etc.

Moreover, the comparison shows that, at international level, there is a shift of perspective regarding the public sector. Thus, the citizen is seen as client and the public administration entity as supplier of services/products. At the same time, a limited use of ratio indicators (effectiveness, efficiency or productivity) can be noticed at international level, similarly to the state of facts at national level. However, instruments such as: benchmarking analysis, citizen's charters, quality awards etc., mentioned in the international literature more than a decade ago (Kouzmin A. et al., 1999), are not part of the Romanian performance measurement system used in the public administration.

4. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The previous sections pointed out the main results of the analysis of the model for performance appraisal of civil servants in Romania, as well as the results of the comparison of the performance measurement system in the public administration at national level with the systems at international level. The research findings consist in the limits of the national model, since in Romania, a traditional bureaucratic public service is still prevailing. Based on the limits thus identified, authors make a series of suggestions for improving the national model of individual performance appraisal in the public administration. Our proposal is that the model comprises criteria defined clearly by numerical indicators, in connection with the responsibilities set in the job description. The suggested criteria and performance indicators are:

(a) Criteria: qualitative performance, with the indicators: ●absenteeism rate, ●rate of medical leaves, ●number of conflicts with internal and external collaborators, ●number of identified cases that could generate conflicts, ●deviations from the codes of conduct, ●number of cases in which deadlines were not met, ● number of complaints from citizens; ●communications skills in the relationship with citizens, ●average time for responding to citizens' requests, depending on the degree of complexity, ●rate of answering to citizens' inquiries correlated with the total inquiries, ●results of the internal and external audit engagements, ●value added by internal audit recommendations through the way in which they are implemented, ●improvement in the quality of services offered from the last performance appraisal of the employees.

(b) Criteria: financial performance, with the indicators: ●ratio between the added-value of human resources due to continuous training courses and the cost of the courses, ●ratio between the quality of training courses and their cost, ●percentage of salary expenses in the total expenses, ●additional costs for the entity due to the errors of personnel, ●additional costs generated by loss of trials initiated by citizens or external partners as a consequence of the errors of personnel.

Moreover, in our opinion, an essential condition for the performance of civil servants is the optimal initial selection of appropriate personnel for the public administration. Personnel should be appointed mainly on professional criteria, such as competence and experience in the field.

In conclusion, the model of performance appraisal applicable for civil servants working in the public administration of Romania requires further improvement, as proposed above. Future research plans include: to assess the performance measurement system in Romanian public health care institutions and to develop and test an enhanced performance measurement model in this field.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by CNCIS-UEFISCSU, project number PNII – IDEI code ID_1827/2008, no. 955/19.01.2009, *Panopticon on the performance connotations in the public sector entities in Romania – creation versus dissemination.*

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