
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION'S MANAGEMENT: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

This study investigates several challenges for public administration's management with the intention of revealing some possible solutions in an attempt to improve the management of public administration. The main conclusion of this study is that improving public administration's management is possible if it is based on a coherent strategy, which may take into account the economic, social, and environmental problems that need to be solved in the near future. The study was carried out using a wide range of sources from the national and international literature, as well as personal experiences related to the issues concerning the public administration. The findings of this study may be used for further research in the field of improving public administration's management.

Keywords: Management, Public administration, Challenges, Solutions, Sustainable development.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study explores some challenges for public administration's management with an eye to reveal some possible solutions so as to improve the management of public administration. Therefore, this study reveals first the challenges in public administration, and second, it discloses possible solutions for improving public administration's management.

This study has revealed that there are many challenges of public administration's management, related to the problems of urbanization, industrialization, sustainability, efficiency and effectiveness of the public services delivered to the citizens, etc. The main conclusion of this study is that improving public administration's management is possible if it is based on a coherent strategy, which may take into account the economic, social, and environmental problems that need to be solved in the near future.

2. CHALLENGES FOR THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The local authorities have the difficult task of managing difficult and complex issues of the local communities. The public authority ensures the management of financial resources, but their use is established on account of the electoral programs and surveys, so as to meet the strategic objectives to satisfy the immediate or future needs of the local communities.

The local communities in Romania and in the EU countries are called upon now to ensure local public services which meet the needs of permanent and temporary residents, whose character has proved, over time, to be unlimited. Human needs are many and varied and are amplified by the development of the society and country. Therefore, the development and diversification of public services were generally encouraged by the progress of the society, which has determined new necessities for the population. The local authority was tempted to satisfy these needs for reasons related to the general interest.

There is a confrontation between the financial resources which are typically deep limited, and the needs for public services, whose character is unlimited. For example, the policy challenge for local governments is to further stimulate and enable the development of renewable energy projects in their regions, in agreement with the national agenda, without compromising local social cohesion (Zamfir, 2011, 369). The role of services in social and economic development refers mainly to their contribution to economic growth, but also, more widely, to their contribution to quality of life (Hotaran, 2011: 60). Thus, the local communities are often put in a position to look for financial resources, using loans, when necessary, as an alternative to financing public services and local development.

In contemporary debate, the problems of urbanization and industrialization have been thought taking into account the concept of sustainable development. Moreover, in recent decades, the relationship between urban form and sustainability has become a planning issue (Uggla, 2010: 49-50).

Urban sustainability encompasses economic prosperity, environmental quality and an equitable society of a metropolitan area. This refers to the economic, social and cultural progress without breaching environmental threshold and maintaining intra-generational equity. The three aspects of sustainable design that are environment, society and economy are more and more interrelated and interdependent (Talukdar and Hossain, 2011: 68).

The complexity of environmental problems, the contradicting theories on which national policies were founded, the international confrontation in the elaboration of policies for different problems, the contradiction between economic interests and conservation interests are all reasons for trying to improve the elaboration and implementation of environmental policies (Ioan and Grădinaru, 2008).

Latest economic theories reconsider the role of the services for economic development, reviewing concepts of economic growth. One of the most important fields is conducted by the information services (Hotaran, 2011: 60).

The e-government services are key tools for improving urban management and a higher level of e-Government services development is needed in order to transform the interactions between public administration and their clients who may be both citizens and businesses (Plumb and Zamfir, 2009: 175). The types of electronic services vary greatly in public sector. It is natural to expect that services are integrated into processes and information systems of the organization that provides them. However, in public sector organizations it is common that departments and units provide services to citizens rather independently. Departments have different processes and information systems which are not connected. In many cases information is stored in separate databases. This may be enough when services are oriented to information delivery between the public administration and the citizens. For example, providing downloadable documents and forms is simply offering documents in electronic format and making them accessible through the internet (Sirkemaa, 2010: 768-769).

The recent measures undertaken in the aftermath of the economic crisis by most European governments have shown that equal access to and affordability of public services are no longer considered as untouchable rights. The economic crisis has clearly exposed the weaknesses of European welfare states and the need for reforms, but the direction most European governments are going is utterly short-sighted. Not only does it call the universality of public services, one of the underlying foundations of the European social model, into question, but it is also likely to significantly affect the future of Europeans' well-being (Dhéret, 2011).

The European social model is not uniform and European Union member states deliver public services in different manners – involving the state, the private sector and family to different degrees. These differences are mostly explained by institutional and political traditions and also preferences for either individual or collective consumption. Nevertheless, apart from these differences, equal access to basic services and affordability of basic services such as healthcare, education, public transport, distribution of energy, and provision of social rights such as pensions and unemployment benefits lie at the heart of the European model and underlie its solidarity principle (Dhéret, 2011).

Significant improvement in the use of EU funds, both in the public sector and in the private sector is essential for the Romanian economy, especially in the global economic downturn. The Romanian local public administration is rather centralized and more under the control of central authorities (Androniceanu, 2011: 64). The main obstacles to a more efficient use of EU funds were the small number of eligible projects, the bureaucratic process and the lack of transparency. Taking into account the fact that these European funds represent about 2-5% of GDP, in time of crisis is even more important to use the maximum available funding for the period of 2007-2013. However, attracting funds in the absence of careful planning of their future management and implementation can generate major

risks, especially in this period of time of recovery after the financial crisis. Lack of support from payment structures and lack of clear regulations for financial reporting could lead to failures and, consequently, could lead to additional difficulties for the Romanian economy.

3. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS OF IMPROVING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION'S MANAGEMENT

Local governments can improve not only decision intelligence to locate and tackle social problems, but also democratic responsiveness by designing public services customized to citizens' needs and demands (Lim, 2010: 29). For instance, as Popescu (2009: 186) found, at first sight, Bucharest seems to be a city that needs to be "healed", the local authorities concentrating momentarily on ameliorating the urban situation and on finding more or less feasible solutions for solving especially the infrastructure problems. However, the municipality's website was placed on the 129th place out of 130 at the category European eCity Award, judging by the website's utility for citizens, business and tourists, by design and innovation (Popescu, 2009: 186).

Improving the reform strategy involves action programs in the following directions:

- Decentralization of public services (figure 1) and deconcentration of public services (figure 2), which may have a major impact on the process of improving the relationship between the citizen and the public service;

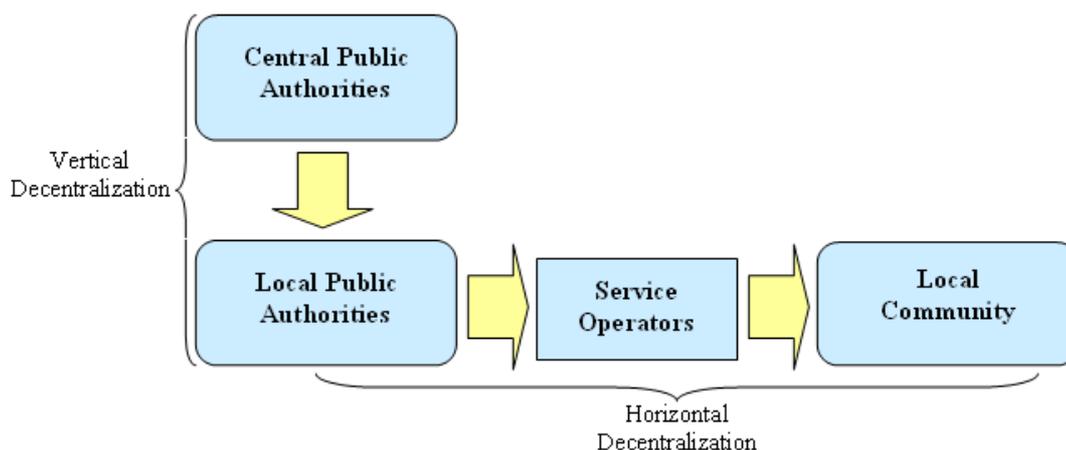


FIGURE 1 – DECENTRALIZATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES

- Improving service quality;
- Redefining strategic objectives;
- Clarifying the skills and competences at different levels of the public organizations;

- Strengthening financial autonomy by increasing the proportion of self-generated income in total income;
- Strengthening the role of prefects by drawing a well-defined legal framework to establish their competence in product validation at the level of deliberative local authorities;
- Establishing uniform rules for investment from public funds (EU funds, state budget, local budgets).

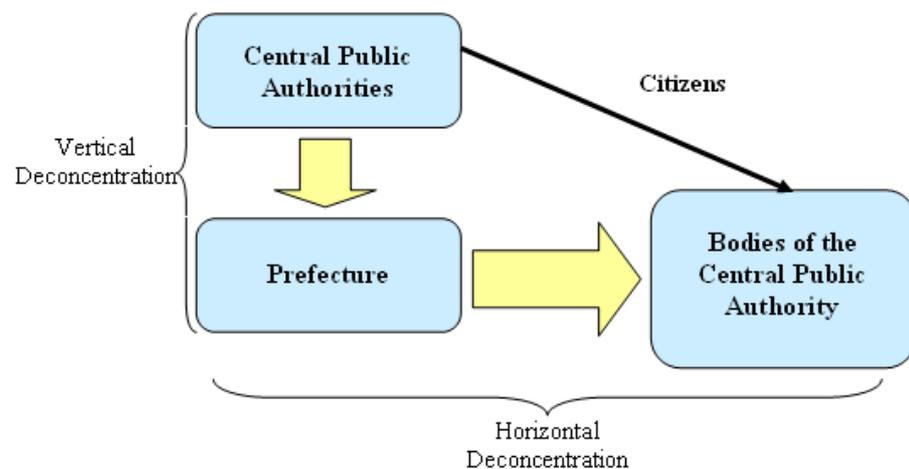


FIGURE 2 – DECONCENTRATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES

Increasing the local capacity to meet the requirements of quality of local public services is based on the following directions:

- Identifying the needs to improve local public services and justifying these needs through cost reduction criteria;
- Establishing the necessary infrastructure to periodically improve quality of public services provided by the public administration;
- Establishing the list of projects and priorities for the improvement of public services;
- Setting up the team responsible for the implementation of new projects in the field of public services development;
- Providing resources, motivation and training to diagnose the causes, finding solutions and establishing ways of control in order to maintain progress and development.

Strengthening administrative capacity in terms of **quality management, timeliness and service evaluation** is a key element in improving the efficiency of public services.

Public services must be provided according to a set of general principles (equality, impartiality, continuity, transparency, freedom of choice, courtesy, promptness, consulting and “value for money”). Provision of public services should be based on standards and measurable objectives in relation to the real performance. The public policy to improve services for citizens is applied to all government agencies and local government.

The analysis of the current situation has revealed a concern of citizens regarding the timeliness and the quality of public service delivery, as well as the lack of public authorities' interest to serve the citizen.

Improving the quality of public services delivered to the citizens involves:

- Addressing the complexity of processes and regulations from the perspective of citizens and businesses, in order to simplify and to reduce the administrative barriers;
- Monitoring and reducing the time of service delivery (with a corresponding reduction of their costs);
- Introduction of a quality system that includes measurable objectives and standards for comparison of services for citizens.

In order to increase the quality of delivered services there is a need to adopt the following measures:

- Developing, testing and implementing cost and quality standards for public services;
- Developing methods to measure the administrative barriers;
- Developing mechanisms/ tools/ procedures to improve the tax collection system, including the development of an interface for the existing databases;
- Implementing initiatives to shorten the time of delivery of public services (one-stop shop for citizens, electronic planning services for citizens, documents management, the use of the tacit approval rule, etc.);
- Ensuring training in the field of public services performance assessment;
- Analyzing the specific problems of public services in order to simplify and reduce the administrative barriers for citizens;
- Introducing and maintaining into operation the management systems;
- Using electronic mechanisms such as Internet portals and databases;

- Implementing the framework documents regarding the delivery of public services (documents that establish a set of general principles of providing quality public services to citizens).

Recent improvements in institutional and legislative framework of public service is an opportunity to develop a strong **management culture in public administration**, but this depends on the investment for the development of skills and competences of the personnel involved in providing public services and managing public institutions. In particular, the need to find solutions related to structure and capability in order to respond to the deficit of training into the public administration is a top priority. This is accentuated by the high standards of training needed for the public management reforms. It is therefore necessary to adopt the following measures:

- Review of the structures and implementation of resulting proposals, implementation of modern tools, establishment and operationalization of new structures such as the center for public management reform, inter-community development associations, a body of professionals in local public administration, etc.;
- Introduction of reforms regarding quality management;
- Implementation of a human resource performance management system;
- Development of a training system for the personnel from the public administration;
- Attendance of the managerial staff from the public administration to postgraduate programs and lifelong learning programs;
- Attendance to training modules in areas such as public procurement, ECDL, foreign languages, project development, bidding and project management, etc.

The reform strategy of the public administration highlights the need for **decentralized public service delivery**, hence the imperative of continuing the decentralization process. There are many issues related to decentralization in the three priority sectors that are health, education and social assistance, such as:

- Excessive institutional centralization;
- Overlap between the existing structures;
- Disturbances in the distribution of competences;
- Unclear presentation of decision-making levels;
- Resistance to the decentralization of administrative structures at all levels.

At the same time, developing new management skills and higher standards in customer service are necessary to increase the quality of provided services. Moreover, special attention must be paid to the use of public funds and to the responsibility regarding their spending in order to increase citizens' satisfaction with the efficiency of public services.

In order to continue the decentralization process there is a need to adopt the following measures:

- Training and technical assistance for planning and coordination structures involved in the decentralization process;
- Development of procedures for cooperation between the central and local government and between the local authorities and schools/ hospitals/ decentralized social services and other structures involved in the decentralization process;
- Training for the personnel that work in the local public administration, especially in the education sector (including representatives of local public administration in schools) and in the health sector, so as to effectively and efficiently implement new decentralized services;
- Training for management staff of hospitals and other health facilities (hospital managers and board members);
- Support for the evaluation of the pilot phases of the decentralization process in undergraduate education and for the implementation of the recommendations of evaluations;
- Optimization of the structures of the newly decentralized services in the three priority sectors;
- Carrying out research studies and developing strategies to support decentralization initiatives.

In Romania, administrative simplification was influenced primarily by the objective of improving administrative regulations in terms of cost effectiveness and improving the services provided to citizens. In addition, this process may have other effects or may be influenced by other objectives. Many of the administrative simplification tools and practices used to improve the efficiency of administrative regulations lead to measures to improve transparency and responsibility and therefore to reduce the risk of corruption.

Within the local public administration there is a need to improve the existing tools and to develop new tools based on the information technology that offers unprecedented opportunities to ensure greater coherence and efficiency of regulatory interactions between government, citizens and businesses.

The administrative barriers for businesses are significant, especially for SMEs. It is also important to consider the cumulative effect of all the regulations which apply to the enterprises, to not only the effect of those who have been recently introduced. Excessive bureaucracy brings additional costs to the businesses, prevents the entrance to the market of new companies, and discourages innovation initiatives. Furthermore, this creates uncertainty, which can disrupt business planning and can affect companies' ability to respond quickly to the new market opportunities. Also, excessive bureaucracy has negative effects on the competition in the economy and leads to the reduction of the economic performance.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study has revealed that there are many challenges of public administration's management, related to the problems of urbanization, industrialization, sustainability, efficiency and effectiveness of the public services delivered to the citizens, etc. On the other hand this study has identified some possible solutions in order to improve public administration's management.

Within the local public administration there is a need to improve the existing tools and to develop new tools based on the information technology that offers unprecedented opportunities to ensure greater coherence and efficiency of regulatory interactions between government, citizens and businesses.

The main conclusion of this study is that improving public administration's management is possible if it is based on a coherent strategy, which may take into account the economic, social, and environmental problems that need to be solved in the near future. The findings of this study may be used for further research in the field of improving public administration's management.

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