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The perspectives of adult education in the managerial assistance in Romania

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Abstract

This survey is an in-depth analysis of the continuing / inservice training system for the Romanian manager assistants against the background of a paradigm we have not come across in other similar specialized studies – that is adult education. We have conducted, based on a coherent analysis of the research data available from the national and international databases, an investigation aimed to find some alternative solution for creating potential flexible paths of continuing training.

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1. Issue statement

The application-oriented potential of a research field such as adult education is traditionally connected to highly complex educational phenomena which are also largely applicable for educational purposes. The research we are currently proposing does therefore not necessarily go along the classical inquiries in the field, yet we are persuaded that – due to its construction and provided its findings are immediately applied to the social and economic transfer area, - our research can prove extremely useful when it comes to design training programs for managerial assistance.

Managerial assistance as a scientific field was mainly theorized in surveys and papers published in the English language literature and much less in Romanian. We can notice that this is a field of current interest for researchers

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and that its scope is quite vaguely defined. Authors such as Iordache Platis, Vărgolici, and O. Iucu* have worked to demarcate the theoretical profile of this domain and to harmonize the academic standards able to support the process of training specific skills for the managerial assistance field. To succeed in this very industrious process, given that, historically speaking, the specialization was introduced at academic level in the Romanian universities in 2005 the academic conditions needed to be gradually regulated in a way close to the requirements of the broader field of public administration. The new study field called Managerial Assistance and Secretariat was carefully structured in the academic context of quality supply, which is duly structured in the Romanian higher education system and is coordinated by ARACIS.

A possible list of competencies approached as proficiency levels specific to assistant managers from the perspective of juridical and administrative sciences / studies have been analyzed in the study “Assistant management in Romania – Curricular and professional approach from administrative sciences point of view” and described as following:

1. Knowledge and understanding: knowing and using the basic notions of administrative law, putting together a cognitive style specific to juridical fields of study, developing skills in the public function domain, knowing the jurisprudence applied to public administration, prompting a systemic vision in the field of administrative law institutions.

2. Explanation and interpretation: developing the skills to interpret a law text, understanding and bringing arguments regarding situations doctrine differentiation, developing interpretative skills concerning the administrative law concerns applied to public administration.

3. Instrumental–applicative: using the basics tools and methodologies specific to juridical sciences in general and to administrative law in particular, applying the administrative law principles in actual or simulated situations of public institutions, projecting juridical situations specific to administrative law.

4. Attitudinal: promoting a system of cultural, moral and juridical values in the approach to administrative law, involvement in partnership relations to other parties – institutions with similar responsibilities, showing a positive and responsible attitude towards law in general and administrative law in particular.

Even all these competences have been classified from the perspective of initial training our objective is to stress what so useful could be reanalyzed from the perspective of continuing and adult education.

Moreover, the National Qualification Agency proposed a professional profile, a set of competences, and concrete results of the learning process in this field, yet with no future design at all on career development and continual professional training.

2. The Role of the Initial and Continuing/ In-service Training in Educating Manager Assistants

The efforts of the academic world mentioned above made initial training in the managerial assistance field a clearly defined field, close to all the international requirements, yet we are not sure that continuing training in this field can be at least identified at the primary structures level. There were several rather informal and very little organized attempts to establish continuing education/ training programs (in-service training) followed by competence acknowledgment and recognition – a reality quite far from the standards of an approach focused on the flexibility provided by an organized and coherent vision.

The design of a coherent system needs to be based on a duly structured vision able to define professional and academic paths which may potentially use the transferable credit system. In a previous survey called Deontology and protocol in public administration – applications for the public officers training, published in Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences, vol. 81, 28 June 2013, we analyzed the training system of the public servants working in

the protocol and professional ethics field. The conclusions of that survey can be stated as follows: This survey helps setting common goals and action paths at the level of the de professional community of the public institutions, by proposing specific methods to achieve professional enhancement for the public servants in administration:

- Periodical training seminars based on professional standards scheduled at cyclical periods of time or in relation to a certain number of credits accumulated;
- Permanent training seminars (established by the employer in relation to the needs analyses carried out).

One significant point we need to take into account is that a professional career in administration can only be built by accumulating specific knowledge, by exploiting the skills concerning protocol and deontology. We appreciate that this honest plea for a system aimed to establish some paths for the continuing training of manager assistants can only possibly be a reliable approach from the perspective of adult education and training. In compliance with the above, the national policies would be worth being synchronized with the European policies of the same level.

3. Continuing Training for Manager Assistants

The Romanian labor force developed chaotically between 1998 and 2013, under the influence of circumstantial factors of an offer and demand type, rather than a organized structure defined in terms of need analysis/ licensing the suppliers and the training services/ offers.

While considering the sets of opinions of the program suppliers in this field, gathered in a research paper produced within the POSDRU ACCES project, implemented by the Romanian Broadcasting Corporation in 2011*, and trying to synthesize those opinions, we can notice and easily establish a hierarchy (without using any sophisticated statistics principles) of the main issues faced by the continuing professional training suppliers (some of whom are graduates of administrative studies): “poor motivation, lack of interest, lack of self-improvement desire; legislative and methodological issues related to licensing the training suppliers, the certification of the training programs; lack of logistics, of highly operational locations, and of the technical equipment needed during the training seminars; continually and quickly changing legislation, as well as disagreements between specific normative documents; lack of a transparent certification system for the professional training suppliers – unfair competition in the continual professional training field; a low computerization rate and poor access to the databases regarding the training programs provided; poor correlation between the training offer and demand; lack of vision over the development society as a whole; poor use of EQF/NQF regarding the transferable professional credit system”.

Most of the continual training programs proposed by the suppliers of administrative services relieved that the focus essentially lied on the professional competences generated by the professional environment – to a greater extent than transversal competences, which are yet extremely necessary to the systems training the employees for special situations.

*FSE - POSDRU ACCES project, implemented by the Romanian Broadcasting Corporation in 2011, coordinator Elena Petrescu Calciu
Among the very intriguing conclusions drawn by the authors of the survey published as part of the ACCES project, there was one worth mentioning as an interesting comment in relation to our topic: “The poor managerial education of the decision-makers working both in the public and the private sector makes that the potential beneficiaries take continual training as a secondary activity”. According to other respondents, training programs are not designed based on the previous analysis of the training needs, therefore the curricula supplied is out-of-date, almost exclusively theoretical. Our opinion, structured after we experienced the contact with the concrete data on the managerial assistance training offers, is in agreement with this comment made by the experts in specific educational practices.

We have organized an interview, between October and November 2013, with a population of assistant managers who were graduated of the University of Bucharest, specialty Department Managerial Assistance, from the faculty of Letters. It was not about an standardized quantitative research more or less filled with the significance of data’s generalization, it was more an informative research focused on collecting information for improving, in a more qualitative way, the curriculum of continuing / in-service training proposed by our institutional structure. From this perspective I have invited 12 people to contribute to my interview focusing their answer to our previous list of issues which are influencing the process of in-service education / training of manager assistants. The issues hierarchy was not the same like in the ACCES research was, but, taking into account his very important orientation role it is very necessary to focus the new ways of restructuring and reconsidering the reasons which are influencing the new professional offers in the field of managerial assistance:

- legislative and methodological issues related to licensing the training suppliers, the certification of the training programs;
- a low computerization rate and poor access to the databases regarding the training programs provided;
- “poor motivation, lack of interest, lack of self-improvement desire”;
- legislative and methodological issues related to licensing the training suppliers, the certification of the training programs;
- poor correlation between the training offer and demand;
- lack of vision over the development society as a whole;
- poor use of EQF/NQF regarding the transferable professional credit system”;
- lack of logistics, of highly operational locations, and of the technical equipment needed during the training seminars;
- continually and quickly changing legislation, as well as disagreements between specific normative documents; lack of a transparent certification system for the professional training suppliers – unfair competition in the continual professional training field;
In addition, the lack of facilities for concrete practice makes trainers often be theoreticians, therefore unable to provide their trainees with practical training (here we mention that it is unlikely to appreciate the training / education level of the trainers in this field where neither the academic human resources themselves (which are knowledgeable in several fields and operate in an interdisciplinary manner) attended explicitly professionalized education as a part of their training for their career).

Training programs were submitted for most training seminars provided as optional units and most of them included 10 to 30 hours. As far as the size of the curricula is concerned for the programs provided, we can notice that the seminars proposed covered, according to suppliers, the initiation of developing specific competences, to the same extent as the approach to have the competences in progress acknowledged and certified.

4. Conclusions

The analysis we have performed using data processed from a series of extensive pieces of research carried out in our study field allowed us to highlight the instability and the shabby structure of continual training in the social and administrative fields in Romania. Meanwhile, the trainers argue that professional reorientation was on their work agendas to a greater extent than the professional conversion programs. It is indeed challenging to adjust the traditional training courses with the reorientation ones (since additionally we need to reassess the status of the training clients/ beneficiaries, be they junior manager assistants or undergoing a continual training process).

Given this, we have also noticed that the training offer in the domain under analysis was influenced by circumstantial factors of the offer and demand type, rather than by some organized structure defined in terms of need analysis/ certification of the suppliers and of the training services / offers. All these elements can further support the entire complex approach of managerial assistance training from the adult education perspective.

References

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