

HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Abstract

Human resources in the public sector is a complex and current topic. In analyzing this topic, the sociologic perspective allows us, starting from the interactions between actors and the system, to identify and analyze new social relations, formation of identities – individual and collective; the practices of actors, the bottlenecks hindering the harmonization of new social factors and the factors favorable to the transformation of the public sector into a dynamic sector. The analysis of the two components in interaction allows us to expand it to the contemporary experience of work, which is the one of permanent tension between actors and work on the one hand and between work and work conditions on the other hand. In different terms, what differentiates or connects actors at work and their conducts as concerns work situations. This tension is generated by the existence of an ambivalent relation between, on the one hand, the independence of actors, work participation and, on the other hand, the oppression and constraint. Work in the industrial age was central and considered the fundamental social relation grounding it. In the post-industrial age, we are witnessing a fundamental mutation of the purpose and value of work, which generates discarding logics at the level of human resources (the rift between actor and system).

Keywords: actor, system, interactions, alienation, instrumentalization.

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RESURSE UMANE ÎN SECTORUL PUBLIC

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Rezumat : Resursele umane interpretate din perspectiva sociologică reprezintă o temă de mare actualitate. Analiza sociologică sesizează tensiunea care există între actori și experiența contemporană a muncii. Conceptul de muncă în societatea postmodernă a cunoscut transformări importante: numeroși sociologi printre care Meda, Wieviorka și Touraine susțin că munca nu mai reprezintă o valoare fundamentală pentru actorii subiecți.

Cuvinte cheie: competență, resurse umane, sociologie, actor, sistem, alienare, muncă.



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1. INTRODUCTION

In the present context, the world is facing an unprecedented crisis and the entire society is undergoing major changes whose dynamics exceeds the mechanisms of social, economic and political control by which states legitimate their action.

Identifying their limits and finding new solutions becomes a priority.

The issues of general interest to society should be treated with great care to ensure continuity and avoid any turmoil that can dramatically influence the worldwide system.

In all countries, regardless of their socio-political and economic system, there are problems that are reflected in the social life - phenomena such as unemployment, social exclusion and alienation occurring increasingly frequently.

According to Alain Touraine, we are witnessing a "decline of the social or the disappearance of societies" generated by the radical dissociation between economy and social life.

The traditional functions of capital - loans and investment - have changed, the capital, having greater autonomy, has become more volatile than labour.

The author writes that the break between the Actor and the System gives rise to a new type of conflicts. Regarding the contemporary experience of work, theorists have noticed these issues coming up with proposals for their correction.

Touraine defines work starting from society and from "its capacity to transform itself" (Touraine, 1973, p. 7); "society is able to act on itself, to transform through its work; it is the work" (Touraine, 1973, p. 8).

Basically, work expresses the "relation of men with their accomplishments", "a principle to direct their conducts", "the individual valuing their creation, claiming its acknowledgement as product of their activity and not as things".

Alain Touraine considers that the term of human resources is inappropriate, advocating for individuals – actors and their capacity to transform into subjects (Touraine, 2013).

Another interesting matter is the one of the work's purpose and value, matter analysed by Dominique Méda (1998) from the perspective of its "negative centrality" in the post-industrial society and by Michel Wieviorka based on the principle of recognition.

Thus, (Méda, 1998) argues in her book, “Le travail, une valeur en voie de disparition” (Work – a disappearing value) the need to “reinvent work” by replacing its traditional forms (paid work) and the economic rationality with forms of social responsibility allowing individual and collective growth in the organization.

According to such perspective, the different distribution of social goods, based on a new principle of work distribution in terms of income, statute, social protection system, becomes the prerequisite of equal access to work.

Michel Wieviorka points out that the “purpose of work” is built in the relation between employees, organizers, managers and those obtaining material and symbolic benefits from their action (Wieviorka, 2013). The relation has an ambivalent nature based on the permanent tension between two elements: emancipation and alienation or autonomy and constraint, which for an employee lead to exhaustion and suffering.

As Wieviorka, Zarifian deems that the mutations we are witnessing in terms of work make us reconsider its competence and to see it as a society problem.

In agreement with (Zarifian, 2009), the mutation we are witnessing is the one of “work’s return in the individual (le travail qui fait retour dans les travailleurs).

2. HUMAN RESOURCES AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN INTERACTION

The topic approached hereby aims to analyse the interaction between the two elements from a sociological perspective.

We consider that such approach offers some perspective as regards the logics of actors’ action in transforming the system through mobilizing personal capacities and experience.

To identify the factors of malfunction that may occur in the operation thereof, we will highlight some of the characteristics of the two components and in the end we will analyse them together to identify their possible interactions and effects.

Human Resources are defined as all persons who work for a company, administration or organization.

Human Resources, without being a professional sector, are a transverse activity present in all sectors of activity.

The public sector is defined as all activities carried out directly by a public authority (State, local and territory communities under their control) in order to meet needs of national interest.

Human Resources employed in the public sector can be influenced in their work by various factors.

Among these factors, Competence is analysed in terms of mobilization of the employees' personal capacities and experience, which capacity generates new social relations based on initiative and undertaking of responsibility. Thus, competence becomes the fundamental element in the management of human resources.

For competence marks the transfer from the "logic of workplace" (work was defined outside the employee) to the "logic of function" – works is defined by saviors, savoirs-faires and savoirs-etre held by the individual and has larger contents than "savoirs et savoirs faire", mobilizing the actors' intelligence and initiative (Zarifian, 1999).

Analysing the concept of competence, the author emphasizes the role of "contextualized competences", which are "how employees face professional situations".

For this author, "contextualized competences" are competences applied in a professional situation and represent the "practical relation of the individual to a situation" (Zarifian, 1999, p.68).

By undertaking responsibilities, the employees also undertake the consequences arising from the actions carried out towards both themselves and the services' beneficiaries, carrying their professional activities in a "field of responsibility".

By mobilizing their competence, knowledge, the employees mobilize "networks of actors" – of power or prestige – within the company or work "around the same situations" and "share challenges" in "fields of responsibility", as built (Zarifian, 1999, p. 70).

According to Zarifian, the contemporary model of competence is one of a new approach of qualification and the two notions are not opposed or in opposition.

Qualification means to qualify people in terms of what is expected from them; behind such qualification being criteria such as salary amount, career evolution, etc.

For this new type of competence, we are witnessing a fundamental mutation at the level of the work's organization as regards the actors' responsiveness at all hierarchical levels.

Such ability to react is permanent and must face unforeseeable situations, work unknowns in order to not break the continuity of activities – goods and services – and to protect against delays.

This involves an increasing flexibility by polyvalence and a mobilization of poly-competences which are considered the fundamentals of the new productive model.

Today we do not focus only a single type of activity or job with a single specialization. Employees are requested to intervene – whatever their hierarchical position and by mobilizing several type of savoir-faires acquired by training or professions – to answer the unknowns of the professional activity.

Moreover, the insufficiency of professional human resources and the existence of mismanagement lead to strained relations, conflicts between different categories of employees and organization or service in which they are affected.

Michel Lallant (2007) in his Work - A Contemporary Sociology, claims in the name of competitiveness flexibility, quality, customer-or beneficiary-, responsibilities are increasingly put in the charge on individuals. They have to arbitrate between different logics frequently contradictory – observance of deadline or concern for work well done.

This creates a social relationship based on the tension between the individual and organization induced by the mechanisms of the corporate culture.

Another form of pressure occurs between the employee and labor and is caused by the assessment of the employee's employment by the organization's management.

On the one hand, the institution is the one which, by its mechanisms of performance assessment – bonuses and promotions – officially acknowledges merits.

On the other hand, in the same organization, we are witnessing confusion generated by the assessment criteria. The logic of merit applies to individual performance that operates through the logic of rationalization by objectives.

In other words, we distinguish and reward the one who has been performing and employees routinely show their adherence to this rule.

At the same time, we witness the pressure between equality and merit in the evaluation of work.

The confusion generated by the objective-oriented management is due to the fact that the invisible part of work is not evaluated and to the logic of quotas. The logic of quotas refers to the number of people chosen in advance for bonuses, promotions, rewards. According to this logic, how is individual performance recognized, based on which criteria?

The performance itself appears unclear, as it is infinite and the determination of its limit - where it starts and where it ends - becomes random.

On the one hand we have the speech on merit, reward, effort, implication; on the other hand logic of quotas serves to predefine a number of persons entitled to a certain promotion, bonus or position.

If an individual is selected, it is not because they are performing, but due to an inverse assessment mechanism: I have been selected because I fit the quotas.

Merit is replaced by quota or the predefinition of the number of people who will have access to privileges or positions, becoming prevailing and generating pressure.

At the individual level, even if the employee defines themselves as performing, in reality it is their performance which will be evaluated.

The criteria will be different from those of merit and the importance of diplomas, prestige and seniority will be the new prevailing criteria in assessment, thus generating the rift between work and reward.

The perception of work by actors has a positive dimension - initiative, autonomy and participation and a negative one - obedience, pressure, strain, stress, etc.

Moreover, the perception on the relation between work and one's self causes paradoxes at individual level.

This creates an ambivalent relation which in some cases has paradoxical effects: pleasure and involvement on the one hand, wear and detachment on the other hand.

In some cases, the discrepancy between what they do, what they can do and how they do lead to work under pressure.

Limitless commitment at work is internalized by employees and their alienation from a imposed one becomes an integrated one based on the illusion that professional achievement corresponds entirely to the self-realization as subject.

Work is organized according to objectives – constraints are set, the employees must meet them, and these objectives are increasing from year to year.

Some sociologists argue that this type of objective-oriented management leads to rupture between real work and prescribed work.

A characteristic of Human Resources is the dynamism influenced by many interacting factors.

Globally, we exemplify the globalization of trade exchanges, financial globalization, spatial integration and technological mutations (new technologies); at society level, political, legal, economic, educational

and health aspects; at organizational level, harmonization of the objectives prescribed and individual satisfaction through work avoids alienation effects;

In the Public Sector, we notice differences related to structure, size and management from one country to another depending on their specificity.

These differences are caused by a number of factors such as: historical traditions, socio-political and economic system, institutional culture, individual and collective mentality, population living standards.

We have listed only some of the influencing factors, being able to say that the Public Sector is characterized by structural heterogeneity and homogeneity of administrative practices in countries of institutional tradition.

By comparison, in former communist countries, we notice an inconsistency in the exercise of administrative practices, the performance being poor in relation to beneficiaries.

Given the strategic nature of the Public Sector, an important aspect is to anticipate the assessment and monitoring of risks which can lead to the occurrence of institutional bottlenecks on short and medium term and, in case of expansion on long term, they affect society as a whole.

An important factor in avoiding malfunctions in terms of administrative practices in terms of quality public services is the professionalization of human resources.

In countries with strengthened democracy and market economy, these malfunctions have been reported noticed and thus, reforms and actual measures have been implemented at structural level.

For instance, in France where the public sector accounts for almost 25% of the active population compared to a European average of 15%, public institutions of high education have been established since 1872 to train high public servants and superior officials for public careers.

In France, "the mandatory path" is training senior officials in specialized agencies.

We can mention the National School of Magistracy (ENM), the School of Advanced Studies in Public Health (EHESP), the Institute of Political Sciences (Sciences Po) and the School of High Administration (ENA).

When E. Boutmy (established the Free School of Political Science, the European higher education was a wide site where competition between academic models was very sharp.

According to Rigaud (2007) while merit and competition were replacing birth rights and wealth in terms of access to high positions, while social sciences were becoming autonomous and the sciences of the

State were structured to meet the needs of the modern and bureaucratic Nation-States, the need to create Schools of Public Studies became imperative.

In 1883, the economic and financial sections and the general section (public law and history) were established and in 1893 the economic and social section for training future diplomats and high officials.

In the institutional history of this School, there naturally occurred the importance of the collective memory of the institution-depositary of the French national history of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Established in 1945, the National School of Administration (ENA) is part of "Grandes Ecoles" and its mission was to "democratize" the access to the state public function.

Today, it ensures the selection and initial and continuous training of French high officials and international officials, offering its graduates access to management and leadership positions in French public positions.

ENA trains its students for a double mission – expertise in all essential domains of the public action and public management. Obviously, such matters are not entirely solved, but through constant surveillance the system works coherently.

In the East-European countries, given the lack of institutional tradition and culture, we notice malfunctions at the level of management – over-sizing of employees; excessive bureaucracy; overlapped structures to coordinate and control similar objectives; lack of transparency; corruption; mafia-like networks attempting to seize activities generating high economic profit.

Tributary to the practices mentioned above, the staff operating in the public sector acts inertial many cases, not being able to adjust to their current work tasks.

In Romania, the mission to train staff from the public sector is ensured mainly by SNSPA and ASE.

3. ISSUES IN APPROACHING THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Both in the Private Sector as well as the Public Sector, goods and services are produced, budgets and staff problems are approached to reach objectives.

The difference occurs in the nature of objectives - in the Public Sector, the objective is to meet the general interest and the private sector is about profitability and profit.

Differences also exist in terms of Human Resources.

The Public Sector, the greater security of jobs due to the status of the public administration (recruitment, compensation, advancement, career, etc.) is the symbol of neutrality and equal opportunities, while these issues are less obvious in the Private Sector.

In compensation, the private sector's wages better reflect personal involvement.

In legislative terms, job occupancy or appointment of officials is made according to criteria established institutionally.

In the private sector, employment is determined differently by each company according to its objectives, which can be changed at some point in order to maximize profit.

The public sector turns out to be however essentially based on legal rationality while the private sector is rather based on managerial rationality (Chevalier and Lochak, 1982).

The attempts in the second half of the 20th century to implement private management in the public sector without taking into account its particularities proved inadequate.

With the emergence of New Public Management, the aim has been to modernize the public sector through performance management.

The introduction of this type of management in the public sector has been driven by the European political will to replace the welfare's previous forms considered inefficient with forms of private management based on objectives of efficacy, quality and cuts of public spending.

These objectives were found in the contents of all reforms to modernize the European Public Sector.

The introduction of this type of management requires the State to clarify its role and missions and to define those that can be provided directly or by delegation.

According to Braun (2001), "almost all examples foreign to the French reality show a net correlation between the reduction in size and the missions of the State and its reform able to achieve significant success".

Thus, the management methods that have traditionally been used in the private sector have spread and implemented in the public sphere under the name of the New Public Management.

The introduction of market logic in the public sector has led to the emergence of new notions such as flexibility, effectiveness, efficiency, governance and evaluation of competences.

Public management as opposed to administrative culture focuses on product, results and performance, which can be obtained through proper management of staff, resources and programs.

The New Public Management, having a transversal nature, is manifested in several areas: strategy, finance, marketing and Human Resources.

So far, the introduction of this management in France has happened recently (2000) and with certain slowness caused by two important factors.

The reduction of the number of public servants started only in 2003 and the process accelerated in 2007 through the reduction of staff in the state public administration.

The organic law concerning the laws of finance to obtain better control of expenses and increase of managers' responsibility (LOLF) enacted on August 1st, 2001, came into force only in 2006.

For administrations, LOLF meant its orientation to a process of modernization and management through performance; for public servants, it meant a clarification of their mission, contributing to the discharge of services and for the beneficiaries of public services, it meant an increase of the services' quality in terms of public services.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The worldwide society is experiencing an extremely rapid and complex development. Thus, the particularities of human resources in the public sector must be taken into account. In terms of theories, there are differences in the approaches regarding the analysis, instruments and methods.

Given the complexity of this topic, an interdisciplinary approach is surely the one which can offer solid solutions. Theoretic models do not entirely foresee the effects of their implementation in the social life and they must be corrected permanently, adjusting them to constant changes.

The management and administration models which have proven successful in certain sectors, expanded to the public sector, should take into account its particularities and the impact they could cause.

The human factor plays a decisive role which exceeds the bureaucratic procedures and institutional rules.

The system's efficiency and performance cannot reflect the individual in its subjectivity or entirety.

The instrumentalization of the individual having as consequence the blur of creativity leads, in society, to conflicts and tensions which cannot be controlled at some point.

Sociologists analyse the individual through their subjectivity and the theorists of the management and administration of human resources analyse through performance indicators.

The perspective on human resources should be a systematic one which allows the identification of interactions between the two elements.

Theorists must realize that the individual is a priority.

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