SELECTING THE RIGHT STAFF AND KEEPING THEM MOTIVATED FOR A HIGH-PERFORMING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN ROMANIA

Key findings from the public administration employee survey

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OUTLINE

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- Key Findings:
  - Selecting the Right Staff
  - Keeping Staff Motivated
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- Recommendations
The WB is supporting the Government of Romania in increasing the effectiveness of its public administration

• Romania’s public administration remains one of the weakest in the EU

• Through the Advisory Services on Developing a Unitary Human Resources Management System Within the Public Administration (HRM RAS) the WB supports professionalizing the public administration and increasing its performance and effectiveness

Source: Bureaucracy Lab, World Bank
ABOUT THE SURVEY

Objective:
• Provide **quantitative diagnostic** of the de facto experience of public administration employees to enrich the analysis in the HRM RAS

Team:
• **WB**: Bureaucracy Lab, Romania Governance Team (GGP ECA West), local survey firm
• **Government of Romania**: National Agency of Civil Servants; General Secretariate of the Government

Sample:
• **81 public institutions** (central, territorial and local levels) in 14 counties
• Over **3300 in-person** and **2700 on-line** interviews

Time:
• June 2019 - January 2020

Outputs:
• Results integrated in all the **HRM RAS deliverables**
• Standalone **survey report**
• **Dashboard** with survey results
SELECTING THE RIGHT STAFF
The screening mechanism emphasizes candidates’ legal knowledge rather than a broad array of competencies necessary to perform effectively in a job.

What kind of questions do you ask/were asked during the interview in the recruitment process? [Proportion That Selected the Option]

- Content of legislation: 0.78
- Analysing/applying legislation: 0.61
- On technical knowledge relevant to the job: 0.62
- On how you would solve certain problems: 0.60
- On your motivation to join the organisation: 0.56
- Questions that tested your soft skills, for instance how you work and communicate: 0.51

- The written exam is solely on legal and technical knowledge, and the interview is often mainly its replication.
- Only half of respondents were interviewed on soft skills (even though required by law).
- The recently recruited (those hired in the last five years) report more questions on socio-emotional skills during the interview.
The recruitment system is not always meritocratic due to limitations in its competitiveness and integrity

- **24%** of those who claim to have got into their current positions through a competitive process say that they **were not assessed against multiple candidates**

- **23%** of respondents think that **exam or interview questions are leaked** in advance to preferred candidates (with more frequency in central institutions)
KEEPING STAFF MOTIVATED
Performance appraisals have formal implications on staff promotions, accountability and pay, but, in practice, appraisal results are rarely used as a basis for administrative decisions.

- **Salaries** are not tied to performance scores
- **95%** receive the highest performance score
- Performance ratings are used as procedural compliance checks for promotions and dismissals
- Opportunities for career advancement are highly limited: 54% say that they cannot get promoted, 18% not interested in a promotion
Performance conversations and informal feedback motivate staff and there is demand for more of it

- **Clear correlation** between formal and informal performance conversations and higher staff motivation
- **84%** had **yearly performance conversations**
- **67%** had **informal performance conversation** with their managers at other occasions throughout the year
- **1 in 3 respondents** would like to receive **more feedback** (going beyond task completion, focused on skills development and career advice)

**How do you think the performance appraisal system could be improved?**

- More frequent performance appraisals
- More motivating performance targets
- More adequate evaluation criteria
- More realistic performance ratings which really assess and differentiate job performance
- More feedback on how to improve individual performance
- Greater relevance of performance evaluation results for pay decisions
- Greater relevance of performance evaluation results for promotion decisions
- Greater relevance of performance evaluation results for dismissal decisions
- A more user-friendly performance evaluation report template
- Forced distribution of performance ratings (eg. only 20% can get “very good” score)
- Annual examination as part of the performance evaluation
Given limited scope for monetary incentives, managers use informal, intrinsic rewards to motivate staff.

Could you tell whether, in the past year, you have received any of the following rewards or recognition from your institution?

- Reported informal incentives come in the form of informal feedback from managers (77%), public praise by managers in meetings (38%) and additional travel or training opportunities (22%)
An amicable work environment, interpersonal relations and trust foster motivation

• 3/4 of those surveyed were content with interpersonal relations within their teams in terms of communication, cooperation within the team, being able to rely on team members in difficult situations and being valued for one’s own work.

• Such positive team experience, as well as inter-personal trust, were positively correlated with motivation and job satisfaction.
• Good leadership practices correlate with staff motivation

• The most important gaps in leadership practices are supporting career development, caring about each of the subordinates, making employees feel valued for the work they do, and encouraging innovation
CONCLUSIONS OF THE SURVEY REPORT

• All of the HRM functions assessed in the survey prove to be executed mostly in accordance with existing laws and regulations.

• Still, these HRM functions do not always translate into the desired outcomes, namely selecting competent and driven staff and motivating them to deliver high quality outputs.

• The administrative system and organizational culture are shown to be overly legalistic and procedural, rather than results-oriented.

• No significant differences found across gender and age groups but considerable variance across institutions (e.g. quality of recruitment and performance management, salary satisfaction, confidence in promotion), which points to the need for targeted actions.
OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

• Increase the emphasis on the desired outcomes of recruitment through a transparent two-stage recruitment process, competency-based testing and screening for public service motivation

• Not just assess, but actively manage, motivate and enable individual performance through improved objective-setting, differentiate performance scores with multi-source feedback and performance data, embedding scores with HRM processes, incentivizing regular feedback, low-cost but high-impact intrinsic incentives (e.g. social recognition tools, constructive work climate)

• Invest in managers through training them in “people management skills”

• Increase the collection, use and analysis of data (eg. regular staff engagement surveys) to facilitate the efficiency, transparency and integrity of HRM processes, uncover inefficiencies, measure the impact of introduced reforms and enable evidence-based decision-making
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation Area</th>
<th>Short-term (3–12 months)</th>
<th>Medium-term (1-3 years)</th>
<th>Long-term (3-5 years)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RECRUITMENT</strong></td>
<td>Introduce 2-stage recruitment process, with competency and public service motivation-based screening and with no alternative entry points</td>
<td>For transparency and integrity in the second stage, NACS should centralize data and conduct ex-post audits</td>
<td>Use big data and AI to predict what candidate profiles are the most predictive of retention and performance</td>
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<td><strong>PERFORMANCE</strong></td>
<td>Improve individual objective-setting</td>
<td>Link individual to organizational level objectives</td>
<td>Ex-ante frame-of-reference training for managers</td>
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<td><strong>MANAGEMENT</strong></td>
<td>Make yearly performance conversations forward-looking with advice on professional development</td>
<td>Ex-post calibration of ratings for high-level civil servants</td>
<td>Further digitalize organizational Management Information Systems (MIS) to enable data-driven performance appraisal and central monitoring</td>
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<td><strong>INCENTIVES</strong></td>
<td>Appeal to intrinsic motivation through non-monetary incentives (e.g. social recognition tools)</td>
<td>Better embedded performance appraisal with career management and compensation</td>
<td>Provide more promotion opportunities for high performers and condition promotions on performance and competencies</td>
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<td>Motivate staff by creating a more amicable and inclusive work environment</td>
<td>Incentivize through centrally coordinated horizontal mobility schemes and staff exchange programs</td>
<td>Allow for individual performance-based salary raise</td>
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<td>Recognize team achievements</td>
<td>Embed motivation aspects with technical skills training</td>
<td>Encourage a less hierarchical leadership style</td>
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<td>Train managers in providing feedback</td>
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<td><strong>OVERALL MANAGEMENT</strong></td>
<td>Recognize effective managers and encourage share of experiences</td>
<td>Condition recruitment and promotion to managerial positions on performance and managerial competences</td>
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<td>Institute regular staff surveys to provide management with evidence for HRM decisions</td>
<td>Develop learning program for managers in “people management” skills</td>
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**Legend**

- **High priority**
- **Medium priority**
- **Low priority**