

# Strategic management of public sector performance: targeted education and training of administrative human resources aligned with competency frameworks

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## **Abstract**

To address the complex demands of modern governance, strategic management of public sector performance is increasingly essential. This study explores the impact of competency-based and targeted education and training on enhancing the effectiveness of Romania's public administration. Emphasizing customized training programs designed to develop role-specific skills, the research highlights how these initiatives can bridge skill gaps, boost operational efficiency, and foster a more adaptive workforce. The analysis begins by outlining key challenges faced by Romania's public sector, including limited resources, rigid bureaucratic structures, and a growing need for modern administrative competencies. Competency-based training emerges as a crucial strategy to meet these challenges, ensuring that public employees acquire relevant skills aligned with institutional goals. A central theme of the study is the integration of digital technologies—such as e-learning platforms, simulations, and mobile learning—which provide accessible and cost-effective training solutions. These tools are particularly valuable in Romania, where resource constraints and regional disparities pose barriers to traditional training methods. Digital learning supports continuous professional development, enabling public servants to stay current with evolving governance practices. The study also examines best practices in applying such technologies, underscoring their role in enhancing training outcomes and employee engagement. Findings suggest that competency-based, tech-supported training programs significantly improve individual and institutional performance. They also promote a culture of learning and accountability, reinforcing the public sector's capacity to respond effectively to citizens' needs. In conclusion, the study offers recommendations for

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Romanian educators and policymakers on designing, implementing, and assessing competency-based training programs. By strategically investing in human capital and leveraging technology, Romania's public administration can modernize its operations, align with international standards, and deliver more responsive, citizen-centered services.

## **Keywords:**

*Capacity building, bureaucratic challenges, continuous learning, digital transformation, institutional resilience.*

## **1. Introduction**

According to the relevant literature, public administration is understood as a structured system of administrative bodies that are characteristic of modern society and are tasked with steering the socio-economic and political development of a country. (Manda, 2012, p. 9). In its complexity, public administration encompasses a broad array of authorities, institutions, and public entities whose primary aim is to fulfill the essential needs and interests of society's members, both at the national and local levels. This institutional framework ensures the continuity of the state and local communities, which necessitates its ongoing refinement and adaptation to contemporary social realities. (Dincă & Mihaiu, 2019) Public administration can also be viewed as an entity that encompasses all human and material resources, with the primary purpose of ensuring the enforcement and implementation of laws. The provision of adequate material, human, and informational resources establishes the necessary conditions for executing the decisions of political authorities as expressed through legislation. (Bălan, 2020)

From another theoretical perspective, public administration is regarded as a human collectivity whose activities are conducted in the service of others, which underscores the critical importance of the human element. Consequently, the effectiveness of public administration is directly influenced by the quality and technical competence of its personnel. The value of these individuals is reflected in the quality of governance, which cannot be achieved in the absence of adequate training and continuous professional development of the entire administrative workforce. Even substantial material and financial resources cannot compensate for a poorly trained staff incapable of fulfilling their responsibilities and efficiently utilizing the resources at their disposal. (Manda, 2012, p. 159) The role of the public sector and governments is profoundly shaped by challenges stemming from globalization, increased human mobility, technological advancement, and societal, demographic, and climate-related transformations. To effectively respond to these evolving pressures, the

administrative system must integrate strong, stable, agile, and adaptable institutions that are receptive to change and continuously driven to develop citizen-centered public services. (Matei & Iordache, 2016)

The evaluation of civil servants in Romania is a complex topic that must be addressed in the context of the new realities confronting public administration. Human resources are a fundamental component of the administrative system, as its proper functioning, performance, and the public's trust in governmental institutions largely depend on them. Furthermore, efforts by public administrations to evolve in line with contemporary trends must be supported by a well-prepared human resource base—both internal and external, including the beneficiaries of public services. (Matei & Lazăr, 2011) Moreover, the adaptation of public administration to new technologies would not be successful without a workforce capable of harnessing the full potential of digitalization, both in terms of professionalizing institutional activities and enhancing the management of individuals involved in these processes.

The processes of digitalization and the integration of artificial intelligence affect all individuals involved in public administration. This creates a clear need to identify emerging trends in required competencies and human resource management practices. These aspects play an essential role in strengthening community resilience. As a result, the understanding of performance is undergoing significant transformation, and the methods used to evaluate it must also be revised accordingly.

In light of the growing pressures on public administration, which include digital transformation, rising citizen expectations, and increasing demands for efficiency and adaptability, the adoption of strategic performance management has become essential. This approach must be supported by training programs tailored to the competencies required, based on accurate assessments of institutional and individual needs. The present article explores the strategic role of targeted professional development, aligned with competency frameworks, in advancing institutional capacity and transforming public administration into a more effective, transparent, and citizen-focused system.

As public administration modernizes, competency frameworks have become crucial tools for aligning human capital with strategic institutional objectives. They offer a structured method for identifying, developing, and evaluating the competencies required of civil servants, supporting a coherent and effective approach to managing human resources.

At the international level, various organizations have developed competency frameworks tailored to the specific needs of public administration. For instance, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has created a competency framework that outlines standards of behavioral and leadership excellence within public institutions. This framework establishes a

shared language that supports all human resource processes and the overarching strategic approach. It is employed for recruitment, performance management, and career mobility, ensuring a consistent and objective application of evaluation criteria. (Organizația pentru Cooperare și Dezvoltare Economică (OCDE), n.d.)

In Romania, the implementation of competency frameworks within public administration remains at an early stage. Although several initiatives and pilot projects have been launched to support the development and application of such frameworks, the absence of a coherent national strategy and suitable infrastructure significantly limits their effectiveness and overall impact. The adoption and adaptation of international models, such as those developed by the OECD, could represent a critical step toward the professionalization and increased efficiency of the Romanian public sector.

## **2. The role of human resources in building efficient and resilient public administrations: the need for training and performance evaluation**

Broadly speaking, performance management refers to the process of measuring and evaluating organizational performance, and it is widely regarded as a strategic element essential to institutional success. This process involves the establishment of performance indicators and their continuous assessment to determine progress. Performance may be measured both in terms of resource utilization and the extent to which predefined objectives are achieved. However, there is no universally accepted definition of performance, as multiple interpretations exist regarding the key elements that should be tracked to quantify it. The foundational principles of performance auditing emphasize economy (minimizing costs), efficiency (maximizing results with minimal resource input), and effectiveness (achieving established objectives). In relation to the evaluation of organizational performance and human resources, analysis can focus on both resource allocation—such as expenditures on salaries, training, and other personnel costs, and the alignment of these inputs with the degree to which institutional goals are met. (Ionescu, 2011) Such analyses are essential on an ongoing basis in order to assess the current state of organizational functioning, to determine whether progress has been made, and to identify appropriate measures for enhancing institutional performance. The individual performance of members within an organization must also be systematically monitored, with suitable methods employed to encourage improvement. There is a clear and direct relationship between individual performance and institutional outcomes, making personal contributions a critical component of overall organizational success.

The definition of performance in public administration presents a challenge due to conceptual ambiguity in the academic literature, where multiple approaches coexist. Nevertheless, the

professional quality of civil servants remains a central theme across these theoretical frameworks. From this perspective, the measurement of human resource performance is considered a defining element of institutional performance, as the civil servant is regarded as the primary driver of organizational effectiveness. (Ștefănescu, Dobrin, Calu, & Țurlea, 2010)

The difficulty in determining the level of performance within the public sector is closely tied to how performance is conceptualized in public administration compared to the private sector, the methods through which it can be achieved, and the criteria used to indicate performance levels and inform evaluation processes. Given these complexities, and considering the financial dimensions involved, public administration performance should be assessed by taking into account the means employed, the process, the output, the outcome, and the overall impact.. Measuring performance in the public sector is a complex endeavor that must take into account the scope of public services, the resources allocated, and the quality of service delivery. The lack of uniformity in assessing public sector performance stems from the multiple interpretations attributed to the concept and the wide variety of indicators that may be used in the evaluation process. Nevertheless, administrative performance assessment should consider the institution's capacity to meet citizens' needs and expectations, while simultaneously adapting to dynamic economic and social conditions. (Profiroiu A. P., 2007) Although there are good practice models originating from the private sector or from other public administrations, their implementation within a given administrative system must be carefully adapted to the specific challenges it faces, as well as to the broader economic, social, cultural, and political circumstances.

In the context of globalization and European integration, it is essential to understand the correlation between the civil service and the efficiency of administrative systems. Human resource management, particularly within the public sector, is expected to face significant challenges in the future. Among the trends identified in the literature are the need to train leaders, to develop individuals in order to enhance employability, and to reprofessionalize the field in order to cultivate skilled human resource (HR) practitioners. Consequently, investment in human capital—through continuous training and professional development—is presumed to enhance employability and address the ongoing need to acquire new competencies aligned with current realities. With respect to HR departments, these should be staffed by specialists capable of acting as strategic partners to public sector managers in the implementation of HR policies that reflect contemporary trends. (Emery, et al., 2016)

All these transformations must be undertaken in accordance with commonly shared principles, values, and norms, in order to avoid any risk of infringing upon human rights. Governments are responsible for ensuring that public services are accessible to all individuals, without discrimination.

In this context, promoting and facilitating professional training in relation to emerging technologies aims to enhance accessibility and generate new opportunities in the labor market, without causing harm or creating exclusion. (Moroiianu Zlătescu, 2006)

Studies on the efficiency of public administration are often linked to the concept of meeting citizens' needs and expectations, and this dimension of satisfaction should also be considered when addressing issues related to the human resources that constitute public administration. From this perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about new needs and expectations among employees in the public sector. (Popovici & Popovici, 2022) It has also generated new perspectives on work more broadly, including within public administration—an aspect that should not be overlooked in efforts to improve human resource management. Although personnel practices vary across public administrations, they can be informed by strategies from the private sector, with the goal of enhancing both institutional performance and employee satisfaction in the workplace.

Administrative efficiency is directly reflected in the ability to fulfill duties promptly, while also making rational choices and effectively utilizing appropriate tools and resources. Task completion time, particularly in the context of an ever-changing society, can serve as a key indicator of administrative performance. From a temporal perspective, public administrations may be perceived as slow when bureaucracy assumes forms that deviate from its classical function, or as efficient when modernized structures can respond quickly to demands and adapt to external stimuli. Optimizing administrative activity translates into maximizing outcomes with minimal effort. (Manda, 2012) Time is closely aligned with the objective of maximizing efficiency, serving as an expression of the human resource's capacity to complete tasks within an optimal timeframe in order to achieve institutional goals. Alongside time, the resources and tools provided to individuals working in public administration are equally relevant. Inadequate or unsuitable equipment may significantly increase the time required to complete specific duties, thereby hindering overall performance.

The efficiency of public administration is closely linked to the well-being of the society it serves, and it requires more than a basic cost-benefit analysis. For this reason, the added value created for citizens is a key criterion in evaluating public sector efficiency. To a significant extent, technological advancement will increasingly shape how public administrations are perceived, making dynamic adaptation imperative. The evolution of technology, particularly the transition to e-governance, has enhanced efficiency in the public sector by shortening communication times and simultaneously increasing institutional accountability. Efficiency can be analyzed from a technical standpoint and quantified based on inputs and outputs. However, when public administration is assessed through a traditional lens, one that incorporates public values, aspirations, and human perceptions, the concept

of efficiency gains new dimensions. The value-oriented nature of public institutions sets performance assessment apart from that of profit-driven organizations. Thus, the performance of a public body must be measured in light of its mission, the nature of its activities, and its operational environment, recognizing that its outputs cannot always be monetized and that profit is not its primary objective. There is no universally accepted definition of public sector efficiency among scholars. According to Max Weber's concept of the "ideal type" of bureaucracy, public organizations are characterized as rational and efficient structures. From this perspective, the Weberian administrative model, grounded in bureaucratic principles, continues to be associated with institutional efficiency. (Manzoor, 2014)

The Weberian model is considered a traditional framework. Closely aligned with the concept of rational bureaucracy, it is characterized by clearly defined areas of competence, where each actor is fully aware of their scope of responsibilities. Hierarchy, career structure, and formal rules play a pivotal role in this model. From a career advancement perspective, promotions are based on objective meritocratic criteria that minimize subjectivity and ensure that positions are filled by individuals with the appropriate qualifications. In contrast, the New Public Management model represents a departure from the Weberian approach, introducing modern, flexible organizational structures and reducing task completion times, thereby focusing more explicitly on performance outcomes. (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011) Although its primary objective is also to enhance efficiency and improve the quality of public administration, the New Public Management model, inspired by practices from the private sector to reform public management, differs significantly from the Weberian model, particularly through its emphasis on decentralized management and the reduction of bureaucratic procedures. (Androniceanu, 2007) On the other hand, the academic literature has also devoted considerable attention to Total Quality Management, a model grounded in long-term success through beneficiary satisfaction and the active involvement of the entire human resource in the continuous improvement of organizational processes. (American Society for Quality, n.d.)

By promoting merit-based access to public office and career advancement grounded in competencies and specialized training, the Weberian model has regained scholarly attention and currently serves as the foundation for contemporary strategies in public administration.

Although elements such as flexibility may offer benefits to the public sector in the management of human resources, these practices cannot be fully transferred from the private sector to public administration. The operational framework of public administration, often codified in legal norms, places a strong emphasis on standardization and uniformity. (Minică, 2004) Uniformity is a fundamental principle in the public sector, which must be capable of delivering the same quality of services to all citizens it serves. In this context, standardization does not imply a limitation of

potential, but rather aims to ensure at least a consistent baseline of service quality. It is intended to guarantee a minimum level of performance while still allowing for improvement beyond that threshold.

Formal rules and the emphasis on their observance do not inhibit innovation in human resource management, even though the framework may appear more rigid. Human resource management (HRM) in public administration encompasses staff planning, forecasting, selection, and recruitment. The effective fulfillment of these functions directly contributes to the overall efficiency of public organizations. (Minică, 2004)

The topic of human resource management (HRM) in public administration is not new. However, in the context of increasingly dynamic and ever-evolving societies, managing the human capital that underpins the public sector has become a strategic priority. Ongoing changes are giving rise to new models of HRM and necessitate the adoption of long-term measures, as well as fresh perspectives on the structures, rules, and procedures through which public institutions operate and support staff development. Human resources in the public sector constitute a key factor for institutional resilience. A strategic approach to HRM that fully leverages human potential should be a fundamental objective in ensuring the efficiency and adaptability of public institutions. (Movilă, 2019)

In a broad sense, public administrations are understood as human collectivities acting in the interest of others. It is precisely from this perspective that the importance of human capital becomes central. Without a competent workforce that is committed to fulfilling its responsibilities in the pursuit of the common good, public administrations cannot achieve high performance. Therefore, the relationship between administrative efficiency and the quality and capacity of the human resource is a direct and inseparable one. In practical terms, public administrations are a reflection of the individuals who compose them. When substantial material and financial resources are placed in the hands of inadequately trained personnel, institutions not only fail to meet their objectives but also risk misusing the resources allocated to them. Consequently, any discussion regarding human resources in public administration must adopt an interdisciplinary perspective. This includes the legal-administrative viewpoint, which formalizes rules for recruitment, selection, training, job responsibilities, and rights and duties, as well as the psychosociological perspective, which provides insight into the needs and motivational stimuli that shape human behavior within both administrative and societal contexts. (Manda, 2012, p. 159) The individuals who make up public administration should be regarded as a long-term strategic resource with significant potential. Just as technologies must be regularly updated in accordance with current trends to optimize efficiency, so too must public servants be continuously trained and brought up to date in terms of theoretical knowledge and practical competencies. Even though the most qualified candidates may be selected at the time



of recruitment, ongoing social and institutional transformations require that these professionals also be periodically updated to remain effective and aligned with evolving demands.

The digital transformation of the public sector involves more than the introduction of technology into administrative processes. It requires the development of an inclusive digital culture based on education, accessibility, and competence. In the absence of coordinated efforts to build digital skills at all levels of society, including both public servants and the citizens who rely on public services, digitalization may deepen existing inequalities and reduce the effectiveness of reforms. In this context, the European Commission has proposed a set of strategic directions aimed not only at institutional modernization but also at increasing digital literacy among the general population. Among the key priorities are the expansion of connectivity, the digital training of public employees, and the enhancement of security and interoperability within government infrastructure. (Boc & Roja, 2021)

Despite the progress made under European digitalization strategies, European Union member states continue to face significant obstacles. These include challenges in attracting and retaining digital talent, a shortage of digital leaders (digital champions), inadequate training in cybersecurity, low levels of trust in the digital transformation process, and insufficient investment. Within this context, human resource management must evolve toward a strategic vision centered on transformational leadership that can identify, motivate, and develop talent, while simultaneously fostering an organizational culture oriented toward innovation and adaptability. The failure to bridge the digital skills gap is not merely an administrative concern; it is a systemic issue that can affect the performance of both the public and private sectors, potentially destabilizing the labor market and the global economy as a whole. (Săvulescu & Antonovici, 2020)

The education, training, and development of human resources are essential for the future of sustainable societies. Attracting and preparing individuals with high potential for careers in public administration is fundamental to addressing the challenges posed by digitalization and the use of artificial intelligence. This process represents a key element in fostering social and economic development, as well as enhancing overall competitiveness (Săvulescu & Antonovici, 2020), and alongside these developments, human resource management must also be adapted. Romania's public administration is currently facing a lack of interest from younger generations, a trend that may have long-term negative implications for meeting future staffing needs.

In order to address the effects of digital transformation and achieve governmental digital maturity, the OECD Framework for Digital Talent and Skills in the Public Sector (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2021) outlines key principles related to the necessity of digitalization in contemporary society and the specific skills it demands. It highlights the conditions

necessary to foster digital transformation and defines a pathway toward building a digital workforce capable of attracting, developing, and retaining talent. To fully capitalize on digital transformation, it is essential to adopt a proactive approach by investing in competencies, training, and education, rather than waiting for the impacts on human resources to materialize before taking action. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2021)

In 2017, the OECD launched the “Going Digital” project with the objective of aligning public policy with the realities of digital transformation and its impact on both the economy and society. The initiative is structured around three strategic pillars: (1) the development of an integrated policy framework to support economic growth and quality of life in the digital era; (2) the analysis of digitalization’s effects across various sectors, including the opportunities and challenges it generates; and (3) a focus on cross-cutting issues such as labor market dynamics, essential digital skills, productivity, and the quality of public services. The ultimate goal of the project is to maximize the benefits of digitalization for citizens and society as a whole. (Lips, 2019) In the digitalization process of public administration, the focus should not be placed solely on the technical and theoretical training of personnel, but also on the psychological dimension of adaptation. Major digital transformations can generate organizational stress, resistance to change, and a decline in motivation, all of which directly affect employee productivity and performance. Therefore, the development of socio-emotional competencies and resilience becomes essential to support a sustainable transformation process. A holistic approach is needed, one that incorporates psychological support, effective communication of change, and the promotion of an inclusive and adaptable organizational culture.

In a context characterized by accelerating digital transformations and socio-economic volatility, the ability of public administration to adapt increasingly depends on the strategic development of its human capital. Civil servants can no longer be regarded merely as executors of administrative policies, but must be recognized as agents of change, capable of managing uncertainty, complexity, and innovation. Within this new paradigm, continuous, targeted professional training aligned with competency frameworks becomes a central tool of strategic performance management, equipping public administration not only with technical skills but also with adaptive capacity.

Current transformations require a rethinking of career design in public administration, with greater emphasis on flexibility, professional mobility, and training adapted to the specific needs of each institutional role. Customized training programs, based on competency assessments, allow for the precise development of human resources by aligning institutional objectives with individual performance. At the same time, institutions must build a supportive ecosystem through investments in digital infrastructure and modern learning tools such as e-learning and microlearning, along with

organizational policies that promote retention and performance. In the absence of such measures, there is an increased risk of losing qualified human capital to the private sector.

Therefore, resilience and efficiency in public administration during the digital era cannot be separated from professional training strategies and the use of competency frameworks as key tools in human resource management. Only through an integrated approach focused on continuous development and performance can public administrations remain relevant, adaptable, and truly citizen-centered.

### **3. The civil service: european and national perspectives**

The civil service constitutes a fundamental component of public law, and more specifically, of administrative law. When approached as a legal institution, its definition—shaped by doctrine, case law, and regulation—can become a point of contention between practitioners and theorists. It is widely accepted, however, that public administrations cannot operate in the absence of competencies, financial and material resources, and qualified personnel. For effective management, staff are typically organized functionally into departments and hierarchically into lines of authority and positions. It is important to note that not all public sector personnel occupy civil service positions, as the human resource structure of public administration also includes contract-based staff. (Apostol Tofan, 2020, p. 317)

A comparative analysis reveals that the understanding of the civil service varies across European Union member states, reflecting the influence of each country's politico-administrative model and national identity, including historical and cultural traditions. Definitions of the civil service differ according to the national context, which is why no single, universally accepted definition exists at the EU level. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that the civil service encompasses the body of human resources within public administration, endowed with specific duties and competencies, without which public services could not function. (Viorescu, 2015)

For example, in Germany, the classification of civil service positions depends on the level of government, with roles divided among the federal, regional (Länder), and local administrations. A distinction is also made between career civil servants governed by public law, civil service roles subject to private law employment conditions, and employees operating under individual labor contracts. In countries such as Denmark, Austria, and Luxembourg, a clear differentiation is made between public officials, personnel employed under collective civil service agreements, and human resources engaged through individual employment contracts. In Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, France, Sweden, Ireland, Greece, and Portugal, administrative personnel often hold civil servant status, meaning their employment is governed by a legal framework distinct from general labor

legislation. In states such as Denmark, Austria, Italy, Germany, and Luxembourg, there is a predominance of public authority positions. In both systems, contractual staff coexist alongside career civil servants. (Viorescu, 2015)

The importance of human resources is widely recognized at the European level, and the career-based system predominates, whereby progression occurs gradually within the administrative hierarchy. This system ensures institutional and individual stability and is based on clearly defined rules for recruitment and selection. Whether this involves a minimal set of formal regulations, as in the Netherlands and Denmark, stage-based selection and open recruitment, as in Germany and Luxembourg (limited to high-ranking officials), the use of independent selection commissions, as in the United Kingdom and Ireland, or competitive examinations and specific professional training requirements, as in France and Romania, significant attention is paid to the quality of human resources in public administration, given their fundamental role in fulfilling the public interest. (Boghian, 2019)

At the European Union level, concern over the need to adapt public administrations in order to maintain efficiency and service quality has been reflected in efforts to support and improve human resource planning in the public sector, as well as in initiatives focused on training and the provision of learning and career development mechanisms. The depoliticization of administration and the professionalization of managerial selection processes, the adoption of best practices regarding internal staff mobility, the development of workforce planning and evaluation systems, and the integration of change management into organizational strategies are frequently promoted across the EU as means of strengthening administrative capacity.. (European Commission, n.d.)

Following 1989, efforts were made to reform Romania's civil service and the role of public servants, with the aim of adapting to and establishing a legal framework that reflects contemporary realities. In this regard, primary emphasis has been placed on regulatory aspects, the establishment of control mechanisms to ensure legal compliance, and the promotion of transparency in decision-making processes. Additional focus has been directed toward improving and professionalizing the public workforce by ensuring job stability, depoliticizing the civil service, promoting career development, and supporting continuous training for civil servants, while also addressing the need for equitable remuneration. Human resource management practices and continuous training mechanisms are essential components of the reform process within a modern public administration that is responsive to the real needs and expectations of citizens. (Ranta, 2008)

There are numerous perspectives on the concept of public sector reform, yet they all share a common objective: to enhance quality and improve the administrative system. In this context, human

resources cannot be overlooked, as they play a critical role in ensuring the sustainability of these reform processes.

The reform of Romania's public administration through the creation of a civil service that is politically neutral, stable, and professional has become an increasingly prominent topic, particularly in the context of the country's accession to and integration within the European Union (EU). Measures in the area of civil service reform are seen as being locally dependent on the continuation of the decentralization process, while at the central government level, progress is tied to the improvement of public policy formulation. (Profiroiu, Tudorel, Dragos, & Radu, n.d.) Nonetheless, public administration inherently intersects with the political sphere due to the nature of its functions and objectives. For this reason, it is important to consider the relationship between the two domains, including the extent and limits of political influence on public administration and, by extension, on the civil service.

Regarding administrative science and practice, in Woodrow Wilson's view (Moț, 2020), they should remain independent of the political regime to ensure the efficiency and usefulness of administrative functions. Nevertheless, the principle of administrative autonomy from the political sphere does not exclude the necessity of cooperative relations between the two domains. While the political sphere holds the prerogative of decision-making, the administrative system is responsible for implementing those decisions. Workplace performance is directly influenced by the volume of information, resources, and opportunities available; increases in these factors lead to greater employee accountability, productivity, and job satisfaction. Furthermore, the ideas promoted within the framework of New Public Management (NPM), as a strategy for reducing political influence over public administration, emphasize the need to enhance citizen empowerment and oversight mechanisms. These aspects must be considered in the human resource management of public administration. An efficient, effective, fair, and diverse civil service can be ensured by increasing transparency and establishing a clear distinction between public administration and the political environment. The political neutrality of civil servants can be guaranteed through a competency-based recruitment system, with selection processes grounded in merit. (Mihăilă, *Interferențele sistemului administrativ cu sfera politică. Consecințe asupra funcției publice*, 2020)

The reform of the civil service in Romania has involved ongoing changes to the legislative framework, the adoption of strategic policies, the promotion of continuous training for civil servants, and the improvement of civil service management practices. (Baltaru, n.d.)

Romanian public administration has undergone significant changes, particularly following the fall of the communist regime, alongside efforts to align with European models and values. Since then, it has remained in a continuous process of reform. (Mora & Radu, 2000) An important milestone in

the reform of the civil service is the development of a formal civil service statute, given that public servants, as human resources, are essential to the functioning of the entire administrative system, alongside material and financial resources. The European Commission places particular emphasis on measures aimed at modernizing the civil service in its assessments of EU member states' performance. (Popescu Petrovszki, 2011)

Adopted in Romania as early as 1999, the Law on the Status of Civil Servants (Law No. 188/1999 on the Status of Civil Servants, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, No. 600, December 8, 1999, with subsequent amendments and additions, in force until 2019) laid the foundation for a legal framework aimed at promoting a professional, trustworthy, and politically neutral civil service. (Matei & Lazăr, 2011). Furthermore, the aforementioned law created the basis for establishing the National Agency of Civil Servants, with the stated objective of developing a professional, stable, and impartial body of civil servants. This goal was pursued through the agency's role in improving the legal framework, generating implementation mechanisms, and ensuring the effective monitoring and control of compliance with the legal provisions related to the civil service (Popescu Petrovszki, 2011)

The early 2000s marked a period of major transformation for Romania in relation to its accession to, and subsequent integration into, the European Union. In this context, the study titled "*Public Administration Reform in the Context of European Integration*" highlighted the pressure exerted by the political system as a key source of corruption within Romania's administrative system, alongside other contributing factors such as the legal framework, the salary system, civil servants' morality, economic pressures, and citizen behavior. Political influence is considered one of the primary triggers for corruption. (Profiroiu, Tudorel, Dragos, & Radu, n.d.), which is why separating public administration from the political sphere—particularly in terms of human resource management—became a reform priority.

From a legal standpoint, the regulation of the civil service in Romanian administrative law is currently set forth in the Administrative Code. Article 5, which outlines general definitions, defines the civil service under letter (y) as "all responsibilities and duties established by law for the exercise of public authority prerogatives by public authorities and institutions." Additionally, letter (z) of the same article makes a clear distinction between civil service positions and public dignity positions, the latter being defined as "all responsibilities and duties established by the Constitution, laws, and/or other normative acts, as applicable, held through appointment or as a result of an electoral process, either direct or indirect." It is therefore important to note that not all human resources within public administration are subject to the same legal provisions. Although, in a broader sense, Article 5, letter (gg) of the Code defines "public administration personnel" as comprising dignitaries, civil

servants, contract staff, and other personnel categories, both at the central and local levels. Accordingly, Article 371, paragraph (1) of the Administrative Code designates as a civil servant any person appointed to a civil service position. (Emergency Ordinance No. 57/2019 of July 3, 2019, on the Administrative Code, as subsequently amended and supplemented, published in the Official Gazette No. 555 of July 5, 2019)

According to the Romanian Criminal Code, the concept of "public official" is defined in Article 175 as applying to any person who, either permanently or temporarily, with or without remuneration: (a) performs duties and responsibilities in order to exercise legislative, executive, or judicial authority; (b) holds a position of public dignity or any kind of civil service position; or (c) carries out, individually or in collaboration with others, tasks within an autonomous public enterprise, another economic operator, or a legal entity with fully or majority state-owned capital, that are related to its business operations. (Law No. 286/2009, as amended and supplemented, published in the Official Gazette, Part I, No. 510 of July 24, 2009)

The principles governing the conduct of civil servants in Romania are also stipulated in the Administrative Code. These include the principles of legality, competence, performance, efficiency and effectiveness, impartiality and objectivity, transparency, accountability in accordance with legal provisions, citizen orientation, stability in the exercise of public office, good faith in respecting mutual rights and fulfilling obligations, and hierarchical subordination.. (Emergency Ordinance No. 57/2019 of July 3, 2019, on the Administrative Code, as subsequently amended and supplemented, published in the Official Gazette No. 555 of July 5, 2019)

The exercise of public office by civil servants must be conducted with professionalism and impartiality, without causing harm to individuals, legal entities, or the integrity of the civil service itself. Civil servants are expected to maintain a neutral stance with respect to any personal, political, economic, religious, or other interests. Given that public servants carry out their duties in service to the citizens, and in accordance with Article 16 of the Romanian Constitution (Romanian Constitution of 1991, republished in the Official Gazette No. 767 of October 31, 2003) which states that "all citizens are equal before the law and public authorities, without privilege or discrimination," it is imperative to separate their professional activities from any involvement that may lead to subjectivity in fulfilling their responsibilities. The relationship between citizen equality and the criteria that may lead to discrimination is further reinforced in Article 4 of the Constitution, which prohibits distinctions based on "race, nationality, ethnic origin, language, religion, sex, opinion, political affiliation, wealth, or social origin" (Romanian Constitution of 1991, republished in the Official Gazette No. 767 of October 31, 2003), criteria that are also incorporated into the provisions of the Administrative Code.

In Romania, the subordination of public administration to the political sphere results in a division of the civil service into three categories: high-ranking civil servants, who are appointed through political influence and therefore subject to frequent changes; contract-based personnel within the public administration, who experience an intermediate level of political influence; and career civil servants, who, as indicated by the legal provisions discussed earlier, are obligated to maintain political neutrality, thereby ensuring greater institutional stability. (Nistiriuc, 2014)

Administration and politics serve distinct roles within society. Politics is responsible for decision-making and is composed of elected officials whose legitimacy derives from being designated by citizens. In contrast, administration is tasked with executing those decisions and is composed of civil servants who implement the policies determined by elected representatives, thereby establishing a relationship of subordination. The legitimacy of public administration is rooted in the expertise it demonstrates. However, this subordinate relationship does not imply that the administration lacks its own set of values. It upholds principles focused on serving the public interest and maintaining impartiality. As such, “the doctrine of political neutrality in administration suggests that elected officials are the sole decision-makers, while civil servants provide support and oversee the implementation of those decisions”. (Moț, 2020) From this perspective, the role of public administration is to implement the decisions made by the political leadership. However, it remains distinct from the political sphere and is not accountable for those decisions, which highlights both its subordination and its interdependence with political institutions. For this reason, public administration must distinguish itself through its professional expertise, a quality that stems directly from the training and competence of the human resources that constitute it.

From another perspective, although the two domains are interdependent, their relationship is often viewed as one of collaboration rather than subordination. Such separation is essential to preventing the politicization of the civil service and to ensuring that public administration is composed of a professional body of civil servants.. (Filipov, 2006)

Public administration and the political sphere must remain institutionally separate in order to cultivate a professional body of civil servants who are capable of fulfilling their duties and responding to the needs and expectations of citizens. In this regard, Romania’s public administration has undergone reform whenever circumstances allowed greater political involvement or when practice revealed that certain positions—though nominally neutral—were in fact politically determined and should be formally recognized as such.

The civil service is inherently dependent on the individuals who comprise it, which is why the reform of human resources within public administration has been, and continues to be, a central component in ensuring effective institutional performance. This is necessary to maintain a corps of civil servants



who are continuously trained and capable of adapting to evolving societal and citizen demands. Although public administration naturally intersects with politics through its function and purpose, the reform efforts in Romania have also focused on establishing a politically neutral body of civil servants. From this perspective, the relationship between administration and politics should be structured in a way that safeguards neutrality. Any action that contradicts this principle should not be normalized or accepted. Intentions to politicize the civil service must be identified and eliminated to enable genuine improvement of the Romanian administrative system.

#### **4. Public sector performance and human resource management**

From a legal perspective, it is important to note that human resources in public administration refer not only to civil servants but also include contract-based personnel. Regardless of this distinction, the effective management of both categories and their activities is essential for achieving administrative performance. Administrative reform trends have not overlooked the civil service. Key areas of interest include adapting to new realities, including updating human resource legislation, increasing opportunities for training, education, and professional development to enhance administrative capacity, and depoliticizing the civil service. (Manda, 2012, p. 160) The quality of public administration is closely linked to the level of preparation of its human resources, making it a necessary condition for institutional effectiveness. Preparation includes both initial training and continuous professional development. These can be provided through schools of public administration, including postgraduate programs, as well as through specialized training and development courses. To attract the most suitable individuals into public administration and to support their growth within the administrative system, the presence of a professional human resource management framework is essential. (Manda, 2012)

Moreover, the work environment plays a crucial role in enabling human resources to fulfill their responsibilities effectively. Their activities must take place in a dynamic and stimulating setting that continuously encourages improvement, the acquisition of new knowledge, and knowledge transfer. This approach enhances both the adaptability of the public organization and its personnel, fostering greater institutional resilience in the face of unforeseen challenges. A supportive climate, well-defined learning processes and procedures, and leadership that actively promotes learning are all fundamental elements of what is known as a “learning organization.” (Antonovici, 2020)

Over time, human resource management reforms in public administrations have focused on areas such as improving service delivery to beneficiaries, increasing transparency in public spending, particularly in relation to personnel expenditures, enhancing the quality of services, and strengthening the capacity of public institutions to adapt and remain competitive with the private

sector. These reforms have undoubtedly been influenced by broader factors such as globalization and the accession and integration of several countries into the European Union. (Matei A. , 2001, p. 21)

The strategies and concepts associated with competency management were initially developed and implemented in the private sector around the 1980s. Subsequently, in the 1990s, with the emergence of New Public Management, these same ideas and approaches were transferred to the public sector. They expanded rapidly across several countries, largely due to the influence of innovative American and British multinational companies, as well as the growth of management consulting and training industries. The competency-based approach offers numerous advantages for both managers and employees, as well as institutional benefits. Broadly speaking, competencies refer to the skills, knowledge, experience, attributes, and behaviors that an individual should possess in order to effectively perform job-related tasks. A competency framework is more than just a list of selected skills; it serves as a tool for evaluation and measurement. Various models of competency frameworks can be explored, with their design shaped by national context and specific administrative traditions. (Horton, Hondelghem, & Farnham, 2002)

The implementation of competency frameworks in public administration aims to optimize human resource management by clearly defining the requirements and responsibilities associated with each position. This approach allows institutional expectations to be aligned with the professional profile of employees, thereby enhancing coherence and efficiency in public sector operations. Since public service roles can differ substantially depending on the area of activity, it is essential to distinguish between general competencies, which are institution-wide, and specific competencies, which are tailored to concrete functional contexts. Such structuring not only enables a more accurate assessment of performance but also supports the customization of civil servants' professional development paths. (National Agency of Civil Servants (NACS), 2021)

Traditionally, competency frameworks have been primarily used in recruitment processes, providing clear criteria for selecting suitable candidates. However, international experience demonstrates that these tools can play a pivotal role across the entire spectrum of human resource management, from onboarding and professional development to performance evaluation and career advancement. Since the 1990s, many European public administrations have incorporated the concept of competency management into their institutional reform strategies, treating it not as a standalone measure but as a foundational component of modern governance. A notable example is the Belgian model, introduced in 1999, which is based on a clearly defined competency architecture structured into five general categories and one technical category, designed to encompass both behavioral and professional dimensions of civil service. Proven benefits of this approach include increased

transparency and predictability in human resource processes, stronger performance orientation, and the harmonization of professional language at the institutional level. Moreover, the systematic use of competency frameworks enables more effective monitoring of career progression, thereby supporting the strategic and sustainable management of human capital. (World Bank, 2020) Thus, effective human resource management entails promoting the principle of professional merit, fostering performance orientation, and ensuring adequate compensation that enhances motivation and retention. This, in turn, supports recruitment and evaluation practices that facilitate the selection and development of human resources suited not only to the duties outlined in job descriptions but also to the required knowledge and competencies. (World Bank, 2021)

In order for public administration employees to achieve high levels of performance, it is essential for institutions to adopt a strategic vision of career management, one that harmonizes the individual goals of civil servants with the strategic directions of the organization. Such an approach involves not only acknowledging employees' professional aspirations but also integrating them into institutional development plans. Career management supports the identification and retention of high-performing staff, the creation of clear career pathways, and the promotion of an organizational culture focused on development and retention. It also facilitates the evaluation and enhancement of competencies needed for both current and future roles, thereby revitalizing employee engagement and maximizing their contribution to institutional objectives. (Manole, 2022)

Competency frameworks play a crucial role in establishing a coherent and predictable human resource management system within public administration. They enable the standardization and integration of HR processes while ensuring alignment between individual performance and institutional objectives. Among their key benefits are the clear monitoring of career progression, the adoption of a strategic perspective on professional development, and the facilitation of effective communication among institutional actors through a shared competency language. From an operational standpoint, competencies are typically divided into two main categories: general or core competencies, which define the minimum requirements for holding a position (such as professional experience, educational qualifications, or technical expertise), and specific competencies, which add depth to the professional profile and include abilities such as strategic thinking, emotional intelligence, or empathy. This classification allows for a more nuanced and accurate evaluation of human potential, with a direct impact on the quality of administrative performance. (Vitriuc & Niculescu, 2020) This structured approach to competencies, when integrated into human resource processes, directly supports the strategic management of performance in public administration by enabling the design of targeted training programs that develop relevant, measurable skills aligned with institutional objectives.

It is important to note, from a legal standpoint, that human resources in public administration refer not only to civil servants but also include contract-based personnel. Regardless of this distinction, effective management of both categories and their activities is essential to achieving administrative performance.

In the context of human resource management, exploring the relationship between the use of competency frameworks and performance-based evaluation is critical. Whether in public or private organizations, these entities are composed of individuals assigned specific roles so that, through collaborative work, they can fulfill organizational objectives. Responsibility for meeting these objectives lies with a manager who oversees the work of the organization's personnel. This role typically encompasses five core management functions: planning, organizing, staffing, leading, and controlling. Planning involves setting action directions and the standards to be followed in achieving objectives. Organizing refers to task delegation and the allocation of responsibilities. Human resource management includes identifying required staff profiles, recruiting, training, and encouraging employee development, including through performance standards, counseling, and compensation. Leading pertains to the process by which a manager motivates others to fulfill their duties and remain committed to personal and organizational growth. Finally, control, devoid of any negative connotation, entails setting performance standards and verifying their achievement, with corrective action taken if necessary. (Dessler, 2013)

When discussing human resource management (HRM), it is important to move beyond the origins of the concept, which emerged in the 1980s as a general philosophy for managing people. Since then, HRM has evolved significantly in response to current realities, and today the term "people management" is increasingly preferred. Organizations depend fundamentally on the activities of the people who compose them. Therefore, the development and continuous improvement of human resources must be prioritized, as these have a direct impact at both the individual and institutional levels. Employees should be fairly rewarded in proportion to their contributions and performance. Accordingly, human resource management focuses on the effective coordination of personnel in order to achieve desired organizational outcomes. (Armstrong, 2023)

Human resource management today is heavily influenced by ongoing and rapidly accelerating economic changes, skills shortages, shifting expectations and desires of the workforce, new technologies, and emerging methods for analyzing human factors. These dynamics are driving new approaches to talent recruitment. Accelerated change also carries the drawback of creating gaps not only in employee readiness but in organizational preparedness as well. From this perspective, attention and resources must be directed not only toward employee training but also toward optimizing management and recruitment processes. (Zeuch, 2016) A work environment that fails to

fully harness employees' potential may lead to stagnation in both individual and organizational performance, or even to a decline.

The lack of a universally accepted definition of human resource management (HRM) often stems from the underlying philosophical interpretations regarding its purpose, role, objectives, and scope. (Manolescu, 2003) Nevertheless, it can be broadly stated that human resource management (HRM) is the process through which employees are recruited, trained, evaluated, and compensated for their work, while also addressing key aspects of the work environment such as labor relations, health and safety, and issues related to equality and fairness. (Dessler, 2013) At the core of all definitions of human resource management (HRM) lies an economic concept: efficiency. (Bocean, 2015)

However, private and public organizations cannot apply the same HRM approaches, as public sector institutions are bound by specific administrative regulations. In public administration, standardization plays a key role in ensuring equal levels of performance and quality of service for all citizens. In contrast, private organizations have the freedom to design any HRM system, provided it complies with current legal provisions and does not infringe upon human rights..

While HRM in private organizations serves as a tool to enhance economic and social competitiveness (Bocean, 2015), in public institutions, HRM enables responsiveness to the real needs and expectations of citizens. This goal cannot be achieved without appropriate human resource management that ensures organizational performance.

From a human rights perspective, regardless of how recruitment and selection methods evolve, they must guarantee equal and fair treatment for all participants in the process. Most importantly, they must prevent both direct and indirect discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, marital status, family responsibilities, religion, political beliefs, potential disabilities, or language. (Bocean, 2015)

Unlike private economic activities, public services do not pursue profit or job creation, but rather aim to meet the needs of the population they serve, and are managed according to specific criteria. Nonetheless, public services are guided by the principles of efficiency, effectiveness, and economy. Human quality is reflected in the quality of services provided and directly influences organizational performance and the achievement of institutional goals. Continuous adaptability must be characteristic not only of the institution itself but also of its personnel, as it is a key driver of performance. The relationships between outcomes and objectives (effectiveness), outcomes and resources (efficiency), and objectives and resources (economy) depend directly on the human resources involved. Evaluating public service performance through clearly defined indicators enables a thorough analysis of resource use, including human capital, in relation to both actual and targeted results. (Dincă D. , 2018)

Din punct de vedere organizatoric și cu impact asupra resursei umane, reformarea The reform of Romania's public administration has aimed to ensure flexibility and adaptability to new tasks, to align the human resource volume with the workload, to clearly define roles and responsibilities, to ensure equitable distribution of duties, and to foster a collaborative and developmental work environment. With respect to human resources specifically, reform initiatives have focused on: professionalizing management, motivating employees, implementing merit-based recruitment, supporting career development, enhancing initiative and adaptability, fostering accountability through participatory decision-making, establishing clear communication procedures and transparency, employee training, and results-based performance evaluation. (Dincă D. , 2018) While these measures are clearly aimed at enhancing institutional performance, such improvement would not be possible without the individual performance of employees.

## **5. Human resource management tools**

### ***5.1. Individual and institutional performance***

Human resource management aims to ensure the effective administration of personnel, thereby creating a motivational and organizational environment in which individual needs are integrated with organizational goals. Proper management involves enabling each individual to fulfill their personal objectives while simultaneously contributing to the achievement of the organization's goals, ultimately serving the interests of its beneficiaries. (Bocean, 2015)

Self-accountability in public administration refers to the institution's capacity to identify, analyze, evaluate, and improve its own practices in relation to citizens. Although the concept primarily concerns the organization of public sector interactions with the public, it is relevant in this context as it underscores the role of human resources in fostering awareness of their responsibility toward citizens. (Matei, Matei, & Iancu, 2011) Individual accountability is a key element in the implementation of good governance principles and, consequently, in achieving organizational performance.

The issue of performance-based remuneration is the subject of ongoing debate among both scholars and practitioners. Proponents argue that performance-related pay strengthens productivity, contending that across-the-board salary increases, applied regardless of individual merit, may lead to decreased performance. Such declines are attributed to reduced competitiveness and a lack of motivation to improve, as employees may feel less compelled to excel if compensation remains the same irrespective of their efforts. However, one drawback of merit-based pay lies in the potential for subjectivity in evaluation processes, especially when assessment criteria lack clarity or

objectivity. On the other hand, equal pay remains a commonly used mechanism to prevent demotivation or alienation among employees and to ensure a uniform standard of living. (Dessler, 2013)

However, standardization does not automatically lead to improved performance. In some cases, it may stagnate individual efforts, which in turn affects organizational outcomes. A balanced approach between these two perspectives can enhance performance by streamlining the merit-based salary increase system, alongside the implementation of effective evaluation procedures and the presence of well-trained managers capable of conducting assessments objectively. (Dessler, 2013) Improving the system should involve increasing remuneration based on seniority, professional activity, and the broader economic changes within society, supplemented by performance-based individual rewards. Performance-based remuneration can take various forms. One such form involves a one-time payment or bonus that is not integrated into the base salary. This lump sum payment has the advantage of not being a recurring expense for the organization, yet it may serve as a stronger incentive than a traditional fixed salary increase, which represents a distinct approach. Moreover, certain models link merit-based rewards directly to both individual and organizational performance. These models often employ calculation methods that consider profit (in the case of private companies) expressed through a numerical index, the employee's base salary, and a performance indicator assigned following an evaluation process. (Dessler, 2013)

However, performance-based remuneration is not currently regulated within the Romanian public sector, and the inefficiency of this approach has been emphasized by the World Bank (2019) in Deliverable 1.2. of the Agreement on Technical Assistance Services for the Development of a Unified Human Resource Management System in Public Administration. According to the report, both the World Bank and the European Commission assess that performance-based pay is ineffective and does not enhance performance. On the contrary, it may have negative consequences for teamwork. As highlighted in the theoretical frameworks discussed throughout this paper and reiterated in the report, there is a risk that objectives might be manipulated when they are linked to financial rewards. For this reason, performance-related pay is among the least used tools in public administrations across the EU. Nonetheless, it is found in the French administrative system. (World Bank, 2019) While this practice is widely adopted in the private sector, its applicability in public administration is contested due to the latter's defining objective of serving citizens rather than generating profit. Given these considerations, the correlation between remuneration and performance in Romanian public administration remains a topic for future research, with current attention focused on performance evaluation based on competency frameworks.

## ***5.2. Performance evaluation and competency frameworks in romanian public administration***

When analyzing the performance of civil servants in Romania, Article 368 of the Administrative Code outlines the "principles applicable to the professional conduct of civil servants and contractual staff in public administration." These principles emphasize objectivity and equal treatment in their interactions with citizens, professionalism as reflected in the performance of duties with "responsibility, competence, efficiency, fairness, and diligence," as well as impartiality and independence, requiring political neutrality in the exercise of duties. Furthermore, they highlight the importance of moral integrity, fairness, openness, and transparency. (Emergency Ordinance No. 57/2019 of July 3, 2019, on the Administrative Code, as subsequently amended and supplemented, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, No. 555 of July 5, 2019.)

Article 373 of the Administrative Code establishes the eleven principles that must guide the exercise of public office, namely: legality, competence, performance, efficiency and effectiveness, impartiality and objectivity, transparency, accountability in accordance with legal provisions, citizen orientation, stability in the exercise of public office, good faith—understood as the respect of reciprocal rights and obligations—and hierarchical subordination. These principles are regulated to ensure that public administration serves citizens' interests at the highest possible quality standards. The individual performance of human resources within public administration is directly reflected in the overall organizational performance. (Mihăilă, 2022)

Another relevant provision of the Administrative Code is Article 485, which addresses the assessment of the degree to which individual objectives have been achieved, in alignment with established performance indicators. Thus, the evaluation of individual professional performance is based on competencies, specifically by examining how well the individual objectives are fulfilled using competency frameworks. From this perspective, positive performance ratings are considered for promotion to higher positions and for the granting of bonuses (as provided by law), whereas negative evaluations may lead to salary reductions or dismissal from public office. Furthermore, the evaluation process also serves to identify and determine professional training needs. (Emergency Ordinance No. 57/2019 of July 3, 2019, on the Administrative Code, as subsequently amended and supplemented, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, No. 555 of July 5, 2019.) The phrase "sunt avute în vedere la" (are taken into account for) is somewhat ambiguous, as it does not necessarily imply that receiving a "satisfactory" rating will automatically result in a 10% reduction in salary or removal from public office. These decisions are ultimately left to the discretion of institutional leaders. Conversely, the law does not explicitly provide direct benefits for positive



performance ratings either. Based on this interpretation, it becomes evident that each public institution retains considerable autonomy in how it conducts evaluations and how it considers the ratings awarded. Another notable omission is the lack of regulatory clarity regarding the concepts of “warning” or “feedback” from a hierarchical superior during the evaluation process.

Although the current Administrative Code includes, under Annex no. 6, the “Methodology for the Evaluation of the Individual Professional Performance of Civil Servants,” and Annex no. 8, later introduced through Emergency Ordinance no. 191/2022, outlines the “Standards for General and Specific Competency Frameworks,” the establishment of a unified competency framework remains a goal of the 2021–2024 Government Program (approved by Parliament Decision no. 42/2021). Given the recent nature of these regulatory measures, their implementation is still in an early phase. Moreover, the explanatory memorandum accompanying Emergency Ordinance no. 191/2022—amending and supplementing Emergency Ordinance no. 57/2019 on the Administrative Code—highlights the alignment with the overarching goals and strategic directions of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR). This legislative intervention is presented as essential for the reform of recruitment and selection policies in the civil service.. (Emergency Ordinance no. 57/2019 of July 3, 2019, regarding the Administrative Code, with subsequent amendments and completions, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 555 of July 5, 2019)

Even though, by the time this report was prepared, the *"Strategy in the Field of the Civil Service for the Period 2022–2027"* and the *"Strategy for Professional Training in Public Administration 2023–2029"* should have already been adopted, both documents remained in draft form. According to its draft, the latter was intended to establish a standardized framework for improving the quality of training processes and the development of competency frameworks. The choice to employ competency frameworks in human resource management (HRM) in public administration is justified by the structured and systemic approach they offer in identifying the skills, knowledge, and behaviors required for effective job performance, while also providing a coherent structure to support the ongoing training and career-long development of civil servants. (Draft Strategy on Professional Training in Public Administration 2023–2029)

According to the outline of the "Public Service Strategy for the period 2022-2027", the strategy aims to provide a unified framework for competency frameworks, operationalizing the national competition for civil servants, recruitment, job descriptions, performance management, etc. The strategy focuses on addressing deficiencies in strategic human resource management within the public sector, supporting reforms that align institutional needs with employee competencies, enhancing the career system, evaluation, and performance management, as well as measures adapted to the current technological and social context. Ethics, integrity, transparency, and the prevention of

corruption are essential elements in the implementation of competency frameworks, performance management, and the professionalization of human resource departments. One of the five objectives of the strategy addresses "the management of competencies required for delivering quality public services and creating a high-performance and attractive working environment within the public service." Aspects such as professional training, development, and retention of human resources are also highly relevant in this direction. (Draft Strategy on Professional Training in Public Administration 2023–2029)

Even in the absence of these strategies, Annex 8 of the Administrative Code, concerning the "Regulations on general and specific competency frameworks," introduced by Emergency Ordinance 191/2022, was amended by Emergency Ordinance 121/2023. However, the analysis of the competency framework content within Romania's public administration will be the subject of the third report, which will provide a detailed analysis, including a case study at the level of a central public institution.

## **6. Training of public servants. Career development and formation**

The quality of public administration is closely linked to the training of human resources, being a necessary condition. By training, we refer to both basic and continuous education. These can be provided through public administration schools, including continuous education through postgraduate programs, as well as through training and development courses. In order to bring the most suitable people into public administration and contribute to their development within the administrative framework, the existence of professional human resource management is essential. (Manda, 2012)

The work environment is crucial for the performance of tasks by human resources. Their work must take place in a dynamic and stimulating environment where they are continuously encouraged to evolve through the improvement, acquisition, and transfer of knowledge. In this way, both the public organization and the people who form it gain the ability to adapt more quickly to unforeseen situations, ensuring institutional resilience. A favorable climate, clear and concrete learning processes and procedures, as well as leadership that encourages learning, are fundamental elements of "learning organizations" .(Antonovici, 2020)

In Romania, in June 2024, the number of occupied positions in public institutions and authorities was 1,293,534, of which 826,522 were in central public administration, according to data published by the Ministry of Finance. (Ministry of Finance, 2024). In the last decade, the number of public sector employees in Romania has remained relatively stable, with a peak of approximately 1.5

million employees recorded between 2007 and 2008. (ASCENDIS, 2023) According to the most recent data published by the National Institute of Statistics (INS), at the beginning of 2023, 7,812,100 individuals were registered as employed (National Institute of Statistics, 2023), with these figures to be updated in accordance with the labor force balance, which is set to be published in October of the current year, as per the INS website (National Institute of Statistics, 2024). Therefore, it can be concluded that approximately 20% of employees in Romania work in the public sector, representing a significant segment within the national economy.

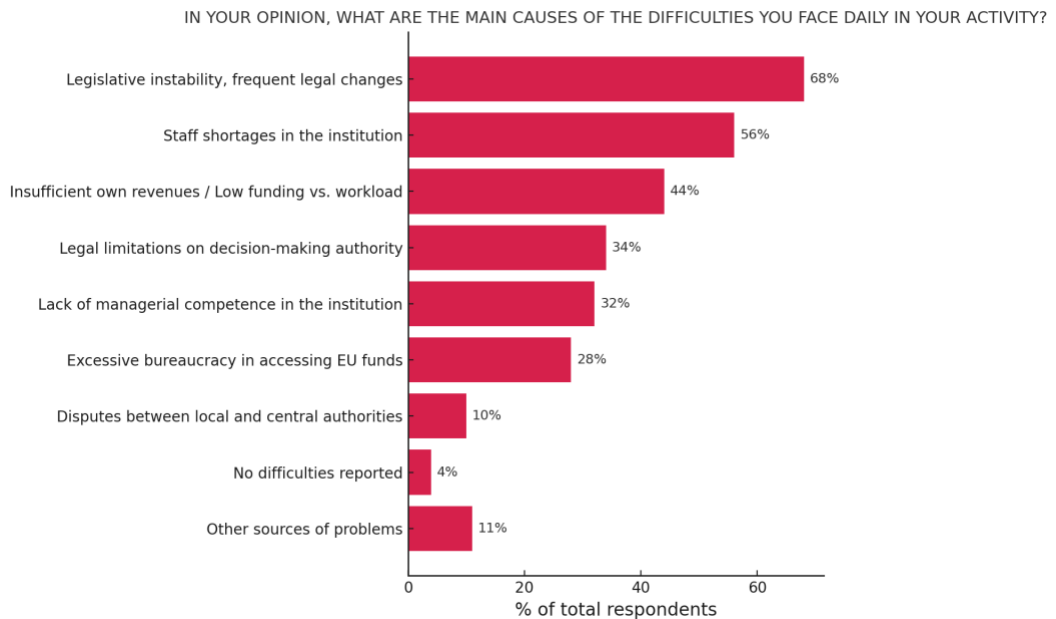
Regarding professional training and development, Article 458 of the Administrative Code highlights that this constitutes both an obligation and a right for public servants. The emphasis on continuous skills improvement is reflected in the obligation of public institutions to ensure the participation of each public servant in a professional training program at least once every two years, including the allocation of necessary funds for these activities within the institutional budget. Concurrently, Article 459 regulates the implementation of an annual professional development plan for public servants, which is mandatory for all public institutions."

### ***6.1. Case study: perspectives on institutional performance and human resource development in public administration in Romania***

According to a study conducted by ASCENDIS in 2023, the majority of managers in the public sector (52%) believe, based on the evaluation of employees' competencies in the institutions they lead, that the employees "have a high or very high level of expertise in relation to the work they are required to perform, due to training courses organized through the access to European funds, individual activities aimed at mastering new legislative regulations, as well as through recruitment based on competitive exams, with an emphasis on professional training" (ASCENDIS, 2023). Considering the role of public institutions in meeting citizens' needs in a qualitative manner and taking into account the opinion of leaders who responded to this study, it can be inferred that only half of public institutions perform well from the perspective of employees.

However, only about 5% of the institutional leaders who responded considered that there is a low or very low level of expertise among their employees, mainly due to subjective hiring criteria, without considering competencies. Responses indicating a medium level of expertise were justified by the lack of training for new staff, the absence of intrinsic motivation among employees, and a lack of motivation methods. However, it was also noted that deficiencies arise from frequent changes in management and the level of preparation of management. The remaining 43% rated the level of expertise as medium. (ASCENDIS, 2023) Therefore, it can be deduced that in many institutions, the

potential of human resources is not fully utilized, resulting in mediocre performance that requires improvement and, in a few cases, urgent action to train staff so that the institution can achieve its objectives. Managerial training is the key element in the preparation of human capital, affecting not only their individual performance but also their motivation toward the work performed. The greatest challenges faced by managers in the public sector in Romania are highlighted in Figure 6.1.1



*Figure 6.1.1. Main Causes of Difficulties Faced by Managers in the Public Sector in Romania*  
*Source: (ASCENDIS, 2023) - Author's own translation into English*

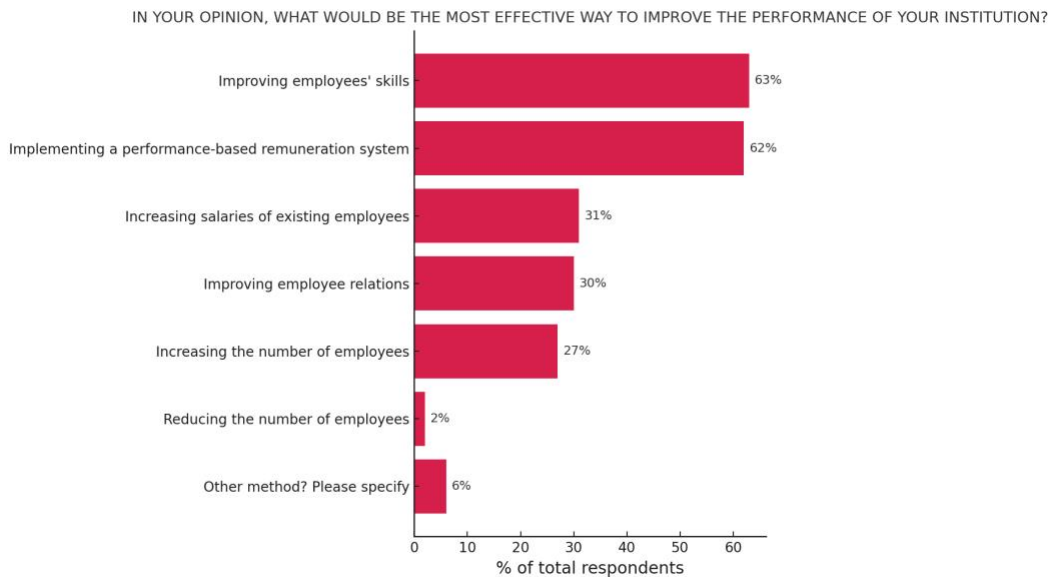
We observe that, in addition to frequent changes in leadership, managers face difficulties due to legislative instability. Furthermore, although data indicates a high number of employees in the public sector in Romania, they are confronted with a staff shortage in their institutions, relative to the workload, as well as insufficient funds to carry out all the required tasks. Moreover, the lack of certain competencies within the managers' portfolios represents a significant challenge.

Other sources of difficulty were identified as including aspects such as: poor cooperation between employees, lack of trust, insufficient time to complete tasks, high workload relative to salaries, unclear work norms, aggression from citizens, lack of preparation among managers, and politicized management (ASCENDIS, 2023). It is clear that training, both for employees and managers, is a

fundamental aspect when discussing organizational performance, and the relationship between the work performed and remuneration also influences it.

Public sector managers must take specific aspects into account, especially when discussing the factors that motivate employees. While in the private sector, salary and benefits packages are a relevant factor, in Romania's public sector, job stability is considered a key factor by the leaders who participated in the ASCENDIS study. Following stability, the most relevant factors include: salary and benefits package, the interesting nature of the work, work-life balance, opportunities to learn new things from colleagues, followed by, with a smaller percentage, aspects such as work challenges, opportunities for developing new professional skills, promotion, and autonomy. (ASCENDIS, 2023).

Regarding potential solutions for improving institutional performance, Figure 6.1.2 presents the responses from the respondents, showing that at the top of the rankings is the need to improve employees' competencies and the implementation of a performance-based remuneration system, followed by increasing employee remuneration.



*Figure 6.1.2. Solutions for Improving Institutional Performance*  
*Sursa: (ASCENDIS, 2023) - Author's own translation into English*

When discussing the competencies that should be improved among employees in the public sector in Romania, digital competencies rank at the top, followed by technical competencies (specific to each position). Additionally, there is an identified growing need for programs aimed at developing managerial and leadership competencies, attracting and implementing European projects, communication and public relations, time management, ethics and integrity, human resource management, public procurement, project management, crisis management, foreign language courses, environmental protection, personal data protection, and customer experience (ASCENDIS, 2023)

The study presented was conducted between May 9th and 19th, 2023, on a sample of 120 leaders from the public sector, of whom 51% were directors (general or deputy), mayors, or rectors, while 25% were department heads, service managers, or office heads. (ASCENDIS, 2023)

The data presented throughout this subchapter highlight the intersections between theorists and practitioners regarding the relationship between human resource training (regardless of level) and institutional performance. This study presents the situation found in Romania in 2023 and has been used in this paper to support the theoretical arguments regarding the need to reform the evaluation and training system of human capital in Romanian public administration.

## **7. Conclusions**

This article primarily addressed the concept of performance in the public sector in alignment with an appropriate human resource management, considering that human resources are the most important asset of an organization, especially when referring to those that form administrative systems. The goal of administrations is to deliver quality services to the citizens they serve, a goal that must take individual performance into account. Enhancing the quality of human resource activity is directly dependent on their management. Therefore, a work environment that allows for the development and improvement of competencies is necessary.

From a theoretical perspective, models such as New Public Management, Management by Objectives, and Total Quality Management were explored. Each of these models presents both strengths and potential risks. Regardless of the reference model chosen, it must always be adapted to the national and institutional context to ensure beneficial outcomes.

Regarding human resource management tools, the chosen mechanism must consider that an increase in individual performance would inherently lead to an increase in organizational performance. Leveraging human potential is essential to ensure efficiency, effectiveness, and economy at the institutional level. Regarding the evaluation and rewarding of individual performance, the specifics of public administrations must be taken into account. Mechanisms such as correlating remuneration

and/or bonuses with individual performance are contested due to the negative effects they might produce, such as demotivation of some employees, encouraging excessive competitiveness that would affect teamwork, manipulating results, etc. On the other hand, performance evaluation in accordance with a competency framework represents a method with numerous benefits, and the specific case of its use in the Romanian administrative space will be explored in the third research article. The implementation of competency frameworks in Romanian public administration represents a central element in the process of modernization and efficiency, promoting meritocracy and encouraging performance. These frameworks are designed to allow for standardization and to contribute to the professional development of public servants. Identifying both general and specific competencies is part of good human resource management, and from this perspective, it opens the way for a detailed analysis of job descriptions and indicators used, the latter allowing for objective evaluation based on clear and well-known criteria.

Another relevant aspect of this article is the presentation of the situation regarding the training, development, and career advancement of public servants. For this reason, the final section of the article presents data about institutional performance and its correlation with human resource preparation in Romania's public administration.

For personnel to excel in their work, administrations must focus on career management, which implies a balance between organizational strategy goals and individual career objectives. Career management thus enables the "integration of individual needs and aspirations into the needs and objectives of the organization; meeting organizational needs for development and enhancing the organization's positive or favorable image through recognition of employees' training and development needs; identifying and retaining the best employees; promoting a career development policy specific to the activity performed; supporting employees in identifying the qualifications and qualities necessary for their current and future positions; ensuring their preparation and development; elaborating career plans; revitalizing employees who are stagnating; guiding and encouraging competitive employees to achieve personal goals in tandem with their potential, needs, and aspirations, taking into account their contribution to the organization". (Manole, 2022)

In conclusion, the strategic management of public sector performance is intrinsically linked to the targeted education and training of administrative human resources. By aligning training programs with well-defined competency frameworks, public sector organizations can ensure the development of skilled, capable employees who can meet the evolving demands of public administration. This alignment not only fosters improved individual performance but also contributes to the overall effectiveness of public institutions. Moreover, the implementation of competency-based frameworks provides a clear roadmap for career development, performance evaluation, and the sustainable

growth of human resources, ultimately enhancing the quality and efficiency of public services. Thus, integrating strategic management practices with competency-driven training initiatives remains a fundamental step toward modernizing the public sector and ensuring it can adapt to the challenges of a dynamic governance environment.

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