

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF SERVICES PROVIDED BY A MINISTRY, IN TERMS OF MODERNIZING MANAGERIAL THINKING

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Abstract: Through this paper we propose an analysis of the relationship between the concept of bureaucracy and the efficiency of existing management at the level of public institutions. We will present a point of view on the possible causes underlying the failure in providing quality services by central public authorities. Another issue will be related to management, by which it was aimed, since 2003, the implementation of an efficient management of public resources and also the ensuring of a permanent change in the management system, depending on the changes produced in the level of general and specific public interests. The degree of achievement of these objectives can be measured through the perception of citizens regarding the quality of public management existing at the level of the entire public administration.

Keywords: bureaucracy, management, management, central public administration, public services

1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of eliminating bureaucracy in public institutions is of paramount importance for many years. For this purpose, considerable funds have been allocated and various projects with European funding have been implemented, but the society's feedback remains unchanged - public services need deeper improvement and a modernization of managerial thinking is essential. However, in order to implement a modern managerial thinking, there must be a

real assessment of the current situation of the management system, the fundamental concepts and theories of management must be known and understood, and by that the quality of public services can be improved.

The failure to implement an efficient management at the level of public institutions leads to the decrease of citizens' trust in the promise of the rulers to ensure quality public services, creates dissensions between the professional categories in the private and budgetary systems, generating a negative

general image of civil servants in the public perception. Taking into consideration that this paper does not aim to provide revolutionary solutions, we specify that the project seeks to give managers of public institutions some guidance in making managerial decisions that will contribute, to a larger extent, to improving the quality of public services.

2 THEORETICAL AND PRAGMATIC CONSIDERATIONS ON THE SUBJECT

The emergence of the first forms of management can be located long before the twentieth century, when the Persians, Egyptians or Romans used various bureaucratic measures in order to manage the state administration. In modern society, the concept of bureaucracy belongs to the German sociologist, philosopher, jurist and political economist Maximilian Karl Emil Weber. He considered bureaucracy as the ideal model of organization, and this model can be summarized as "the phenomenon of asserting the rationalization of the world." The bureaucracy, in Weber's view (GERTH & MILLS, 1958), was based on different principles, as represented in figure number 1, of which we point out:

- division of labor, a principle according to which complex activities were divided into several parts, so that the duties of each employee were as easy and efficient as possible to perform;
- formal selection, which involved holding public office only on the basis of specialist training;
- career orientation, respectively managers must be dedicated to the profession they practice and have a technical competence;
- formal rules and regulations, a principle that involves the use of system operating procedures and standards.

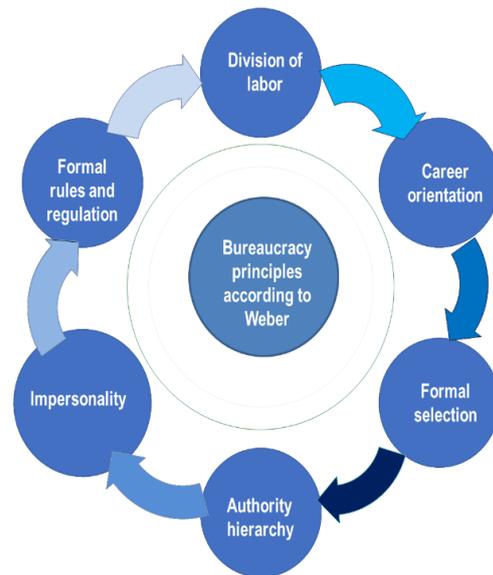


Figure 1. The principles of bureaucracy according to Weber

The concept of bureaucracy proposed by Weber was used until the twentieth century by public administrations around the world, but this concept is considered, today, obsolete. Moreover, the term bureaucracy is used by contemporary society, mainly with a pejorative connotation, considering that the activity of public administrations is governed by corruption, nepotism, incompetence or inefficiency. However, we believe that the principles of bureaucracy, as developed by Weber, are still valid today. The rules and procedures are used at the level of each central public administration, these being called system procedures, operational procedures, organization and functioning regulations, methodological norms, orders, instructions, etc.

Without these rules and regulations, no department in a public institution would correctly identify the activity that it has to carry out or what are the competences of each structure within that authority. It would create confusion, duplicate activities or some tasks would not be fulfilled.

Annually, civil servants are evaluated, according to the legislation in force, for the activities they carry out within the specialized structures. Laws, norms and regulations are the main elements on the basis of which a civil servant can be disciplinary investigated, within the disciplinary commissions, for non-fulfillment or improper performance of the activity. The legislation in force offers every citizen a mechanism through which it can generate the sanctioning of a civil servant for the inappropriate submitted activity. Thus, a civil servant is obliged, for his or her own safety, to master very well what are his or her duties, which are the procedures under which he or she must carry out his or her activity, in order to avoid a possible sanction. The sanctions of the disciplinary commissions, depending on the committed deed, can even lead to the dismissal of the civil servant from the public position. Citizens are often dissatisfied with the work of central public authorities, considering, for example, that an opinion should be issued quickly, within a few days. (Banciu, Doina, 2020) But they are not willing to comprehend what it would mean to issue a permit in a few days, for the demolition of a building, which later turns out to be protected by a heritage law.

Because the time required to issue an opinion is not established by the desire of civil servants to make the citizen lose his or her patience, but because there are documents that must be verified, analyzed, correlated, interpreted. The pre-established stages of drawing up notices cannot be skipped, in order to avoid the risk that some documents do not correspond or even do not exist in the file. If all the rules and procedures assumed by a public institution, which involves the study of technical documentation, the analysis of specialized studies, the expression of the decision of experts in specialized commissions, would be observed, anarchy would set in. Rules and regulations are necessary, even paramount, for certain areas of activity, especially for public institutions, which

manage public resources. What would it mean for the Ministry of Health, for example, to issue authorizations for any vaccine produced in the context of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, without testing in laboratories, without going through each stage of approval, so without complying with rules and regulations? The signatory of the opinions was subsequently identified as directly responsible, accused and possibly tried, if these vaccines proved to be lethal to the population. Citizens no longer have patience, they want everything in the relationship with the central public authorities to be resolved favorably and quickly, but the responsibility to be fully assumed by the civil servant. The fast processing of documents produced and managed by a central public administration is sometimes impossible, in the context in which the endowment of the central public administration is not updated, year by year, with state-of-the-art technologies, but works with old information systems, digitization of the central administrative system being only in the project phase. A file can also contain hundreds of pages of documents for issuing a single notice, which involves an investment of time for data processing.

Another principle advanced by Weber is that of formal selection, which recommends holding public office only on the basis of specialized training. This principle is rarely applied. It is notorious the way in which certain employments are made within the central public administration, on criteria that are not related to the specialized training.

The exceptions exist, because in the community of civil servants there is the following phrase "there must be one less clever to work", here "less clever" being, in fact, the honest civil servant, who took an exam to be hired, who works harder, to cover the work of those "with relationships" / "smart" and in the heart of the bosses. Another explanation for the non-application of the bureaucratic principle stated above may be the frequent change that occurs in

the management of public institutions. For example, in the period 2016–2020, seven ministers were appointed to lead a ministry. Each minister sets up his own cabinet, made up of counsellors, but, unfortunately, they, with small exceptions, come from areas of activity that are not connected to the central public administration and do not have a solid knowledge of the legislation. Not knowing the normative acts in a certain field makes you unable to advise a minister on how he or she should approach a given situation, such as saving a historical monument, removing a state-owned company from insolvency or managing specific museums problems.

A common shortcoming in a ministry, for example, is that there is a 'self-sufficiency' approach, both at the level of management and at the level of state secretaries (or, for a better understanding, deputy Ministers) or advisers of ministers, that the advice of people who have been working for more than 10 or even 20 years within the institution (Banciu, Doina, 2015) is not necessary. A wrong approach, from our point of view, given that no adviser of the minister, much less of the secretaries of state, have an overview of the vast field they have to manage, have no experience in the management of the specific activities of a ministry, and do not have the necessary experience in similar positions, which would give them the certainty that they will advise a dignitary well in making a correct decision. Every change, which took place at the level of the leadership of a ministry, also involved changes at the level of advisers to ministers or state secretaries.

Sometimes, there is not enough time for each minister and state secretary to properly master the responsibilities or competencies of a ministry. Hence the constant blunders of the ministers, who are hunted by journalists. Practice has shown over time that, in the end, the decision is generally taken by the manager of the

central public administration, respectively by the minister, regardless of the recommendations or views expressed by civil servants with experience in the field. which activates. The decisions of the ministers are then subject to public evaluation. Thus, citizens often describe the activity of the minister as the expression of the unprofessionalism of civil servants, but this approach is wrong. Decisions are not taken in accordance with the recommendations of civil servants, which are formulated on the basis of laws, procedures, rules and administrative experience, but are most often taken in accordance with the interests of political parties, with existing economic and political affinities at some point.

As the concept of bureaucracy was considered to no longer meet the needs of modern society, the concept of management emerged, bringing a new perspective on the management of institutions and the role that the leadership of those institutions must assume in public life. Public management, in Androniceanu's conception, represents the totality of the processes that are found within the administrative systems, through which laws are applied and the public interest is satisfied (Androniceanu Armenia, 2004). Public management is based on several fundamental principles, represented in figure number 2.

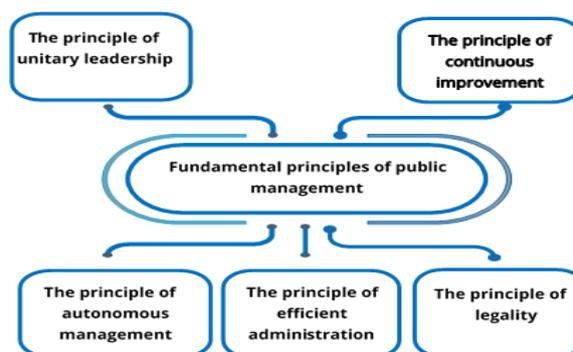


Figure 2. Fundamental principles of public management

- the principle of unitary leadership, which involves the assumption and implementation by all decision-makers of the concepts of management, having a common, unitary, clear vision of the public sector;
 - the principle of autonomous management, which presents the differentiation of the public management activity, related to the scope and according to the existing general or specific interests;
 - the principle of continuous improvement, which means the permanent change of the management system, as a result of the development of analysis processes, depending on the changes that have occurred in the domestic, international environment or at the level of general and specific public interests;
 - the principle of efficient administration, which represents the efficient management of all available resources, in order to achieve the set objectives;
 - the principle of legality, which ensures that the provisions stipulated in the normative acts will be considered as a legal basis and not as an end in itself, in the context of managerial processes and relations.
- There are public managers in the public administration, who are supposed to exercise the functions of management so that the public institution can provide citizens with quality services, by generating exceptional administrative performance. These functions (Androniceanu Armenia, 2004) of public management are presented in figure number 3.

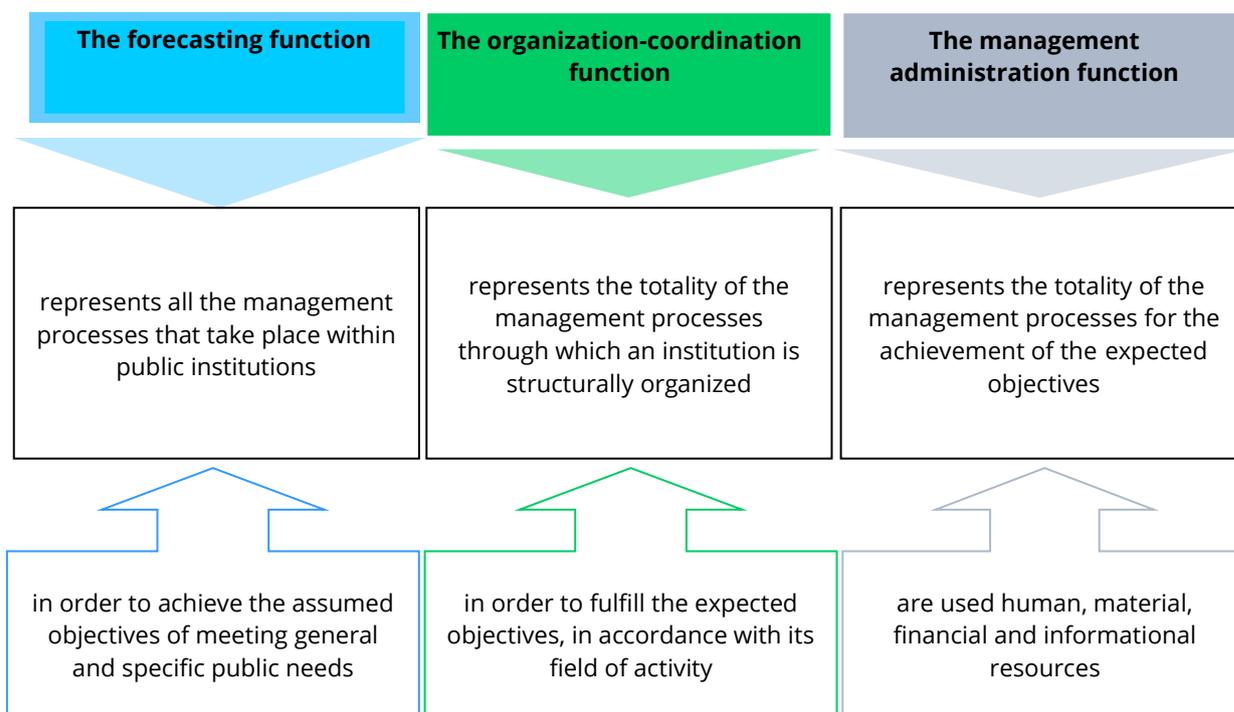


Figure 3. Functions of public management

The forecasting function, considered the most important function of management, represents all the management processes that

take place within public institutions, in order to achieve the assumed objectives of meeting general and specific public needs, there is an

interdependent relationship with other public institutions.

The organization-coordination function of the management represents the totality of the management processes through which an institution is structurally organized, in order to fulfill the expected objectives, in accordance with its field of activity.

The management administration function represents the totality of the management processes through which all the types of resources necessary for the achievement of the expected objectives are used, these resources being: human, material, financial and informational.

In 2003, the Romanian Government had the initiative to accelerate the modernization of public administration, by implementing two projects: the "Young Professional Scheme" / YPP Project, and the "Government of Romania" Special Scholarship (BSGV), with the main objective to form a core of professionals to implement structural reforms of public services.

Public managers have received specific responsibilities such as:

- project coordination, evaluation and monitoring;
- elaboration of the necessary procedures for the good development of the activity of the public authority or institution;
- elaboration of institutions' strategies;
- elaboration of public policies;
- contribution to the elaboration or modification of some normative acts specific to the activity;
- coordinating the quality management implementation process.

It was considered that a quality management can be exercised through the continuous training of public managers in the field of management, to implement a new approach on the role of public institutions. Unfortunately, the effect of the implementation of these projects, with European funding, was

not the expected one and it was not enough, because the citizens, however, do not benefit from quality public services.

One of the reasons is probably the fact that most public managers are not graduates of in-depth management studies. Finally, it all comes down to developing unrealistic strategies, written not to be implemented, with clear, measurable, achievable, quantifiable steps that really improve the work of a ministry, but only to "mark" the annual report to the General Secretariat of the Government.

Strategies are not analyzed if they are meant to add value to any activity within the administrative apparatus, but are only reported as an objective achieved. Unfortunately, most of the strategies are compilations of draft normative acts, fragments from university courses, existing and reinterpreted procedures, without intrinsic value and which will not bring, practically, improvements, so quality public services. Numerous pages with theories, principles, statements will be drawn up, without there being a transposition into practice of a managerial idea. There is no professional evaluator at national level to conclude: why this strategy is useful, how it will be implemented and what are the expected effects of implementing a strategy.

3 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PRESENTATION OF A VISION ON IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EXISTING MANAGEMENT IN THE AREA OF INTEREST

According to the Regulation of Organization and Functioning (R.O.F.) of a ministry, the person within a ministry who fulfills the role of manager of the institution is the minister, being the deciding factor. We consider that the existing management at the level of ministries is typical of his concept launched by M. Weber, respectively bureaucratic management, for the

following reasons: in essence, the activity carried out at the level of a ministry is based on laws and regulations; the hierarchical structure is clearly established by the organizational structure approved by the management, so there are compartments and offices that are coordinated directly by the minister, the structures called services are usually subordinated to the departments, and the departments are subordinated to the minister.

In accordance with Art. 437 and 442 of the Administrative Code, the civil servant has the obligation to fulfill the dispositions received from the hierarchical superiors and to solve, within the terms established by the hierarchical superiors, the works and the distributed tasks; details regarding the authority structure are presented in the R.O.F. of each ministry, where, in the chapter entitled ministry leadership, we find the information according to which the ministry leadership is exercised by the minister. "The bureaucratization of the state, strange as it may seem at first, provided the basis for its democratization, because it eliminated the bases of feudal, plutocratic and patrimonial administration. As no other form of organization allows for the bureaucratic regularity and accountability, however, the bureaucratic form of organization is unlikely to be replaced", said Bert Rockman, Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science, Purdue University, USA.

We believe that there should be a thorough analysis of the reports prepared by each central public authority, in order to verify the usefulness of each report. We consider that the vast majority of reports are only documents that do not bring added value or improvements for any public service, therefore the justifications for their preparation should be rethought. A real analysis, which any public institution should make, would be to record on a monthly basis all the dysfunctions reported by civil servants, regarding the development of activities at the level of the structures in which they work. After the identification of these dysfunctions,

concrete, realistic measures should be analyzed and adopted, which should make the activity on the structures more efficient, in order to finally find an efficiency and, in general, of the institution. This activity could be carried out by public managers, who carry out their activity at the level of each central public authority. Unfortunately, public managers do not have basic management knowledge and, implicitly, have not studied, in depth and applied, quality management. The courses you follow can give you an overview of what management activity involves, the theory being only a component of a system that involves the application of theory. We believe that a young public manager, just graduating from college and taken specialization courses in management, should be effectively trained by being involved in the implementation of projects, such as the implementation of a European quality standard for a public institution.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This paper aims to outline an overview of the current state of the existing public institutions management system, with the presentation of direct aspects at the governance system level, respectively the design of the existing ministry level situation. Thus, the paper involves both theoretical and practical approaches to the management system at the level of a public institution, providing significant details. Concepts about management are important for any public institution, and specialized papers, which have been published in the field of organizational science and organization management, have the role of expanding the field of knowledge and providing information on the experience of specialists. Although considered outdated, the principles devised by Weber prove to be applicable even today. The main attribute of the modern central public administration is to solve the problems reported by the beneficiaries of public services,

but this can only be achieved by modifying and adapting the normative acts in accordance with the current needs. So, laws, procedures, regulations, instructions, methodologies, orders, etc. remain the essential elements on the basis of which public institutions are forced to carry out their activity. At the same time, the ideal model of bureaucratic system that Weber promoted had professionalism at the forefront. It is essential for the manager of a public institution to have the support of professionals, well-trained people in the legal, economic, administrative, etc. field. The public administration, at present, cannot ensure a remarkable range of specialists, professionals, as the budgets of public institutions are limited and high staff costs cannot be incurred, as is the case in multinational companies.

We consider that a solution that can be used by the management of a public institution is one that will specialize, in different fields, those already employed. It is a considerable effort, which involves a consumption of financial resources and logistics, but as the legislation allows the dismissal of employees who are not useful only through difficult procedures, the best solution would be a constant specialization. We believe that another reason for the failure of management may be that public managers do not have the necessary support from the leadership of ministries to truly implement new approaches and new strategies. Modern managerial thinking should identify qualitative standards for the specific activity of each institution, which should then be implemented, thus contributing to the efficiency of the administrative act, and, ultimately, to the provision of quality public services.

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