

A NOVEL WAY OF HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT IN THE ROMANIAN CIVIL SERVICE

Marius PROFIROIU
Alina PROFIROIU
Tudorel ANDREI

Marius PROFIROIU

Professor, Public Administration and Public Management Department, Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Tel: 0040- (021) 335.46.53

Email: profiroiu@gmail.com

Alina PROFIROIU

Lecturer, Public Administration and Public Management Department, Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Tel: 0040- (021) 335.46.53

Email: alina_profiroiu@yahoo.com

Tudorel ANDREI

Professor, Public Administration and Public Management Department, Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Tel: 0040- (021) 335.46.53

Email: andreitudorel@yahoo.com

Abstract

This article addresses issues regarding civil service development in the context of public administration reform. There are a wide variety of approaches to the development of the civil service between the countries of Europe. The issues raised by this article are based on the experiences and lessons learnt during the implementation of the Young Professionals Scheme (YPS) in Romania. The YPS is a EU PHARE funded civil service development project, which has a large training component, and which aims to attract some of the best Romanian graduates into the civil service system. This program selects the potential candidates, then trains and assesses them, and assists their placement into the civil service system, following a fast-track career program.

1. Context

The public administration reform depends on the improvement of the procedures, structures and the capacity of the human resources in achieving the key goals. The time pressure on reform is especially critical in the development of human resources, because upgrading skills, attitudes and professional behavior requires significant financial and training resources over a long period of time. In Romania, the qualifications and the skills of the existing civil servants are not optimal, and it will take time and money to improve the quality of the Romanian public administration to the standards of the other countries members of the European Union.

This paper addresses the issues of the civil service development, in the context of public administration reform. The other European countries use a wide variety of approaches to the training and the development of the civil service. The issues raised in this paper are based on the experiences and lessons learnt in the implementation of the Young Professionals Scheme in Romania. The YPS is a EU PHARE funded civil service development project, which has a large training component, and which aims to attract some of the best Romanian graduates into the civil service system. The goal of this project is to increase professional managerial support for the policy formulation and implementation capacity of the Romanian public administration by enhancing the attractiveness of the long-term management career jobs within the civil service for professionals drawn from both inside and outside the public administration. The YPS selects the potential candidates, then trains and assesses them, and assists their placement into the civil service system following a fast-track career program.

The broader context within which this program started to be implemented was the pre-accession of Romania to European Union, when far-reaching reforms had to be achieved within a short time framework. It was a context when rapid reforms and the management of change were critical. It was not a context when a steady-state evolution and a gradual improvement of the existing practices could not be relied upon. Those approaches could be better implemented in longer periods of time. But the short-term required an approach, which could promote a rapid, radical and rational change in the practices used in the public administration.

The institutional framework of that period of fast reform is not altogether obvious. Two institutions, the National Agency for Civil Servants (NACS) and the National Institute of Administration (INA) have individual and joint responsibilities regarding the management and the development of the human resources in the civil service system, and their activity is coordinated by the Ministry of Interior and Reform in Public Administration.. However, their long-term responsibilities and associated goals reflect a stable-state and mature public administration. An important question that needs to be addressed is whether or how far these can be combined with the short-term mission of change management (figure 1).

Change is likely to be stimulated at the macro-level by external factors (e.g. political will arising from the requirements of accession to the EU, etc); while at the micro-level, it can be stimulated through policies and programs which introduce some form of change agent that encourages and promotes change from inside (e.g. Network of Modernizers, Young Professionals).

	HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT	HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT
SHORT-TERM Change management (close political oversight)	Responsibility for creating a new civil service (Issues of locating and empowering rapid public administration reform)	Responsibility for creating and developing a new civil service (Issues of training and development, and novel training needs analysis)
LONG-TERM Stabilization management (general political oversight)	Responsibility for developing the policies, standards and practices of a long-term civil service National Agency for Civil Servants	Responsibility for training and developing the civil service in the long-term National Institute of Administration

Source: Adapted from Strategy for Public Administration Reform in Romania, 2004-2007

Figure 1. Change Management in the Civil Service

2. Description of the Young Professionals Scheme (YPS)

The Young Professionals Scheme is one route that can be followed in becoming a public manager; when the graduates of the program enter the civil service they are conferred the title of public manager.

The profile of a public manager was elaborated in 2004 and it is defined by a competency framework which defines the key qualities, qualifications and skills that a modern public manager is ideally expected to show in his/her personality, aptitudes, professional work and behavior. A combination of tests of potential and performance administered during the training program are used to identify candidates particularly well endowed that are qualified to occupy public manager positions.

Public managers are trained during the program to work in various administrative contexts, both at central, and local levels. They are trained to become specialists in the general management, to have a results-oriented approach, which requires a broad understanding of the public administration mission, duties and tasks. They understand the need for improvement by learning through feedback and careful evaluation of the results, and for vertical and horizontal co-ordination within and between organizations. Their skills in objective-oriented team working, internal and external communication and co-ordination allow facilitate their relevant contribution to all public administration activities. Their foreign language skills represent an important asset in the creation and the development of the EU-wide networks and partnerships.

The YPS, as it is currently designed, divides candidates into two groups, scholars and trainees. In the first nine months, both groups follow a general training program held in Romania, and in the second part of the program, they follow different training tracks of the program.

In the second part of the program, trainees, subject to good performance, are offered a 12-weeks internship in a public administration of a European Union Member State to achieve practical work experience in the respective administrative system. Scholars, also subject to good performance, are offered a scholarship of up to 12 months (including a 4-week internship) in a Member State of the European Union.

For attracting more applicants, in the cycle 2 of the program, the candidates could apply on-line for the program directly on the YPS' website. In this way it was ensured good outreach and a large number of applications were generated from each of Romania's 42 counties. A total number of 942 applications were received, representing a 79% increase comparatively with Cycle 1; 201 of these applications were received for the Trainees Program and 741 applications were received for the Scholars Program. These data shows The YPS selection process has developed from cycle to cycle and the implementation of this program aims to improve and perpetuate the quality of the Young Professional Scheme (YPS).

Until now, the program has tested the performance of the candidates starting from their selection. They being selected based on their qualifications, working experience, and their motivation. A written examination concerning issues of public administration reform and the European Union integration was administered in one of the major European languages. Also, the candidates were required to pass an interview conducted in the foreign language. In the second cycle of the program, as the final stage of the selection process a personality test with an interview was introduced in order to assess the potential of the candidates. This psychometric test provided information on the broad personal characteristics of each candidate. The interview complemented the formal psychometric test by allowing psychologists to validate the conclusions generated by the test for on each candidate, through face-to-face discussions. The candidates were ranked based on the results from all the assessments and only the best candidates were selected.

3. Designing of a new training process

The design of YPS was focused on the training component, where most of the resources were directed. In simple terms the training process can be represented in the figure 2, which summarizes the stages of the program from the selection to the placement and the career development.

3.1 The simple model of the training process

The focus of this paper will be the shaded area of the figure: responsibility for creating and developing a new civil service, addressing issues of training and development, and "novel" training needs analysis (TNA). The "novel" TNA is a reminder that the new models of behavior, attitudes, skills required by the new civil service have not been entirely implemented yet. Dissemination of existing good internal practice is not enough. In all probability, models from elsewhere must be researched, evaluated, adapted and adopted. Figure 3 presents a simple model of a training process, based on inputs and output.

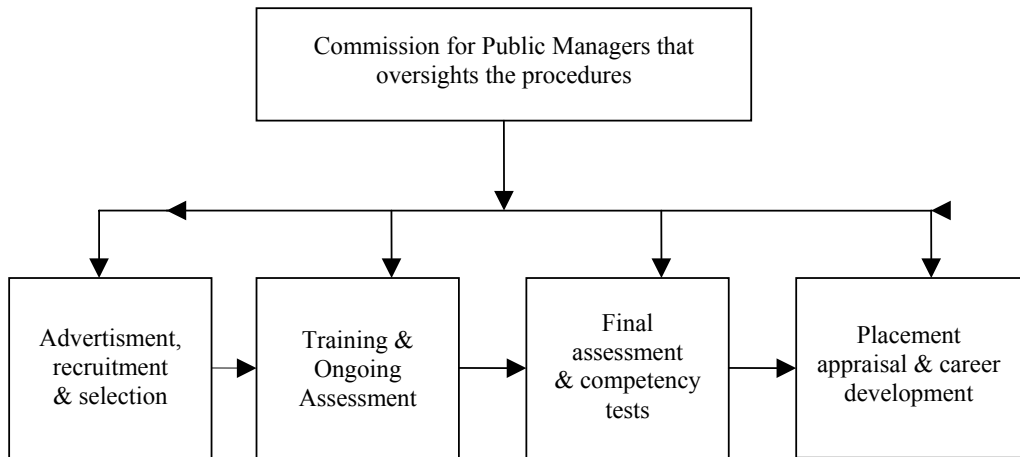


Figure 2. Design of Young Professionals Scheme Cycle 3

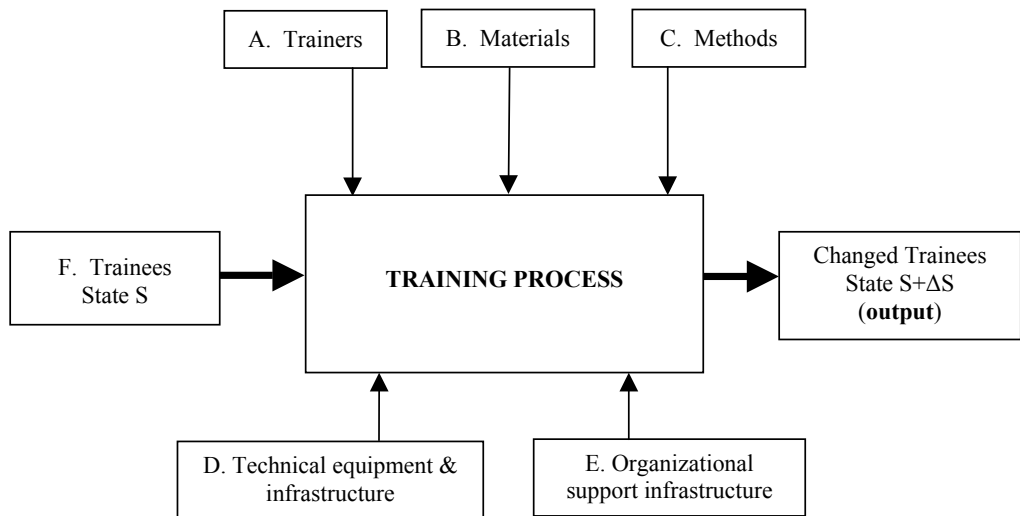


Figure 3. Simple Model of the Training Process

The figure suggests that five types of resource are brought to bear in the training process (trainers, training materials, training methods, technical resources, and an overall organizational support infrastructure) which impact on the Trainees. They start in State S (abilities, knowledge, attitudes etc) and as a result of training change to State $S + \Delta S$.

This simple picture already raises a series of important questions, related to the changes (ΔS) required, such as:

- What are the goals of the training?
- What do we want the trainees to be able to do?
- What is the relationship between resources and their relative importance?

Firstly, the relationship between inputs and output (trainees) can be structured more carefully to help identifying the interdependencies, and to reveal the two of the most common and important elements needed for strengthening the training capacity – the training of trainers, and institutional development (figure 4).

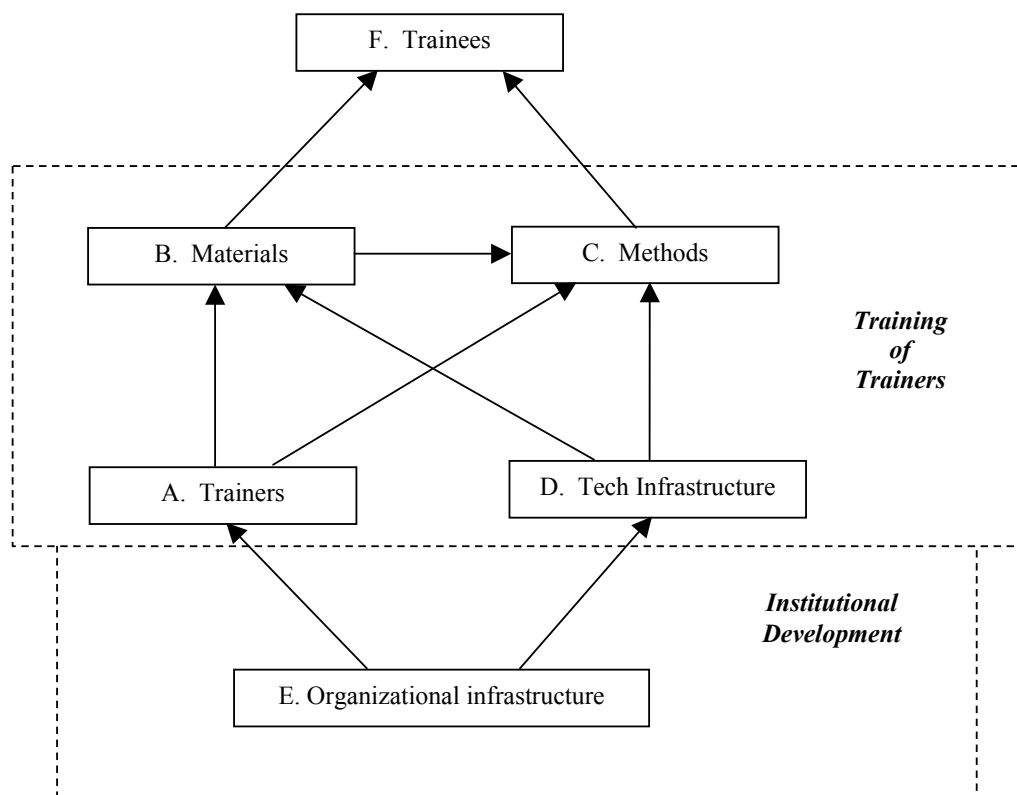


Figure 4. The Training Process – with interdependencies

A lot of work has already been done at INA, regarding institutional capacity building and development. Adequate staffing, training equipment, development of a pool of trainers, and an appropriate institutional design have all been and will continue to be the focus of internal reform, increased state funding and technical assistance. Likewise, the development of trainers, through training of trainers and similar inputs, continues to be addressed. The goal of this work has been to improve the quality of the training, through the improvement of the quality and the quantity of inputs, and the organizational efficiency with which it is delivered. Some of this work has been supported with YPS and other EU PHARE support over the last two to three years.

However, this paper focuses on the outputs, meaning the issues surrounding the sixth element of the figure – the Trainees themselves. In summary, the question that the paper aims to address is which are those attainable changes that we want to achieve?

3.2. Trainees – a competency framework

The goal of the YPS, stated at the beginning of this paper, is to attract, select, train and assess *some of the best Romanian graduates, for a career in the civil service system*. This means that the design of the selection and training process must be founded on a clear definition of the qualities are expected a young professional to have, and to ensure that we know the expectations from the best professionals. Broadly, the our definition must encompass:

- *Personal qualities*: qualities which are to a large degree “fixed”, or at least slow to change, and so largely unaffected by the training itself;
- *Behavioral attributes*: qualities which determine the working attitude, which should be slow or difficult to change, but which feature in the requirements of a new modern public administration;
- *Skills*: qualities which training aims to change, which in some cases (e.g. foreign language proficiency) cannot be improved through a short or medium term training program;
- *Knowledge*: the attribute, which may be altered through education, and which requires continual training throughout career. It is an important component of the self-study and in-service training, but not the primary focus of pre-service training.

Therefore, it is important to distinguish between those characteristics that we want the future civil servants to have (which can not be changed through the training program and which must be tested through the selection process), and those qualities, which the training program can legitimately and effectively address.

The Competency Framework given in Annex 1 was developed for the first cycle of YPS. It provided the basis for selecting the most suitable psychometric tests that would assess the personal and behavioral qualities of the candidates, which cannot be significantly altered through the training program. In cycle 2, some of these procedures were also used for the selection of the candidates, in order to be confident that we train and develop the knowledge of those candidates most likely to benefit and become good senior civil servants. The more conventional selection methods – written examinations and interviews – should seek to identify the personal qualities and the development potential of the candidates. The aim of this program is to select and train only the best people.

Other qualities and skills are susceptible to improvement over the long term through practice and training but, given the limited timeframe of the training program, the candidates must already have them at the time of the selection to ensure a good base of both candidates and graduates. Examples of these required skills include analytical and critical thinking, decision-making, communication and team skills, and foreign language skills. These also need to be tested through the selection, since they indicate important aspects of the long-term quality of the candidate for the senior civil service status.

The third group is represented by the skills we expect to deliver and enhance through the training process itself, and these include the professional skills where exposure to a combination of knowledge, practice and experience will significantly

enhance the candidate’s abilities. It is important to test these qualities from the beginning, because they are the skills we expect to strengthen through the pre-service training, or later through in-service training courses. Examples include accounting or budgeting skills, constitutional and legal awareness, planning and evaluation methodologies.

The competency framework should be extended to include also those skills and the abilities of the Trainees that need to be developed by the end of the training program. Such a framework would serve better short-term goals, and would be more flexible over time, as the training needs of the civil servants – in this case Public Managers – would become clearer. In the short-term, the “novel” training needs analysis has to draw on the expectations of the public administration, regarding EU accession, client/citizen orientation, effective coordination, and the new area of the public policy making in the Romanian Government.

The training model is now modified to strengthen the importance of the competency frameworks, as shown in figure 5.

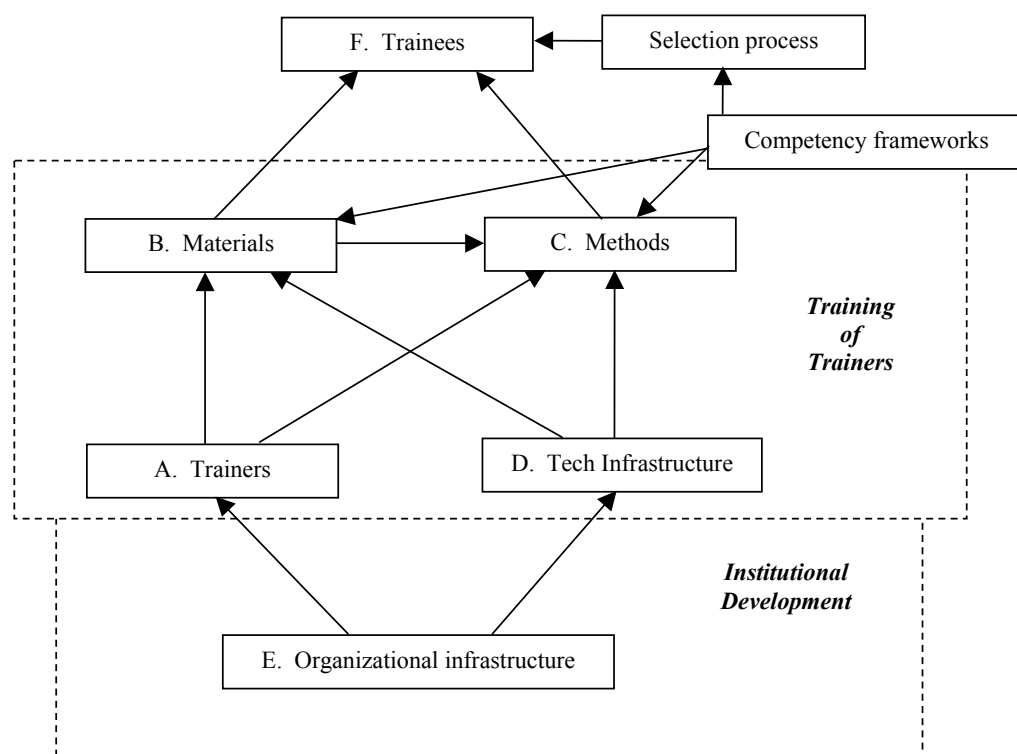


Figure 5. The Training Process with Defined Competencies

3.3. The design of new training process

So far, this paper analyzed the selection process and the training goals of the YPS. The important element within the project cycle management not yet introduced is the *feedback* stage, meaning to compare the results of the program with the original goals.

The design of the YPS selection and training components brings up a number of important assumptions. In summary, the most important one refers to the required qualities of a public manager. The training design is based on a preliminary assessment of this profile, reflected in the competency framework. However, this framework needs to be tested.

An important, but so far little developed task of the YPS is to generate a database of the candidates pursuing the YPS program. For the graduates of the program, their actual performance can start to be assessed, since they are already working for few months. The individual data existing for each candidate – both training and potential (psychometric) results – will gradually allow a comparison between their actual performance, and the factors on which the trainees were selected and evaluated. We need to assess which characteristics of a candidate, and which training inputs, appear to be the most important in determining their final working performance, and their impact on the public administration system.

This feedback loop is the most neglected instrument in the management practice in the public sector. It is hoped that the YPS will, through experience and actual practice, will identify those selection, training and assessment methods of the civil servants, which, in the context of rapid change and the need for reform, have been proved to be the most effective means to achieve successful outcomes. The costs and the potential impact of the training program make the feedback stage a key factor contributing to the long-term development of new training institutions and to the improvement of the quality of services delivered by them.

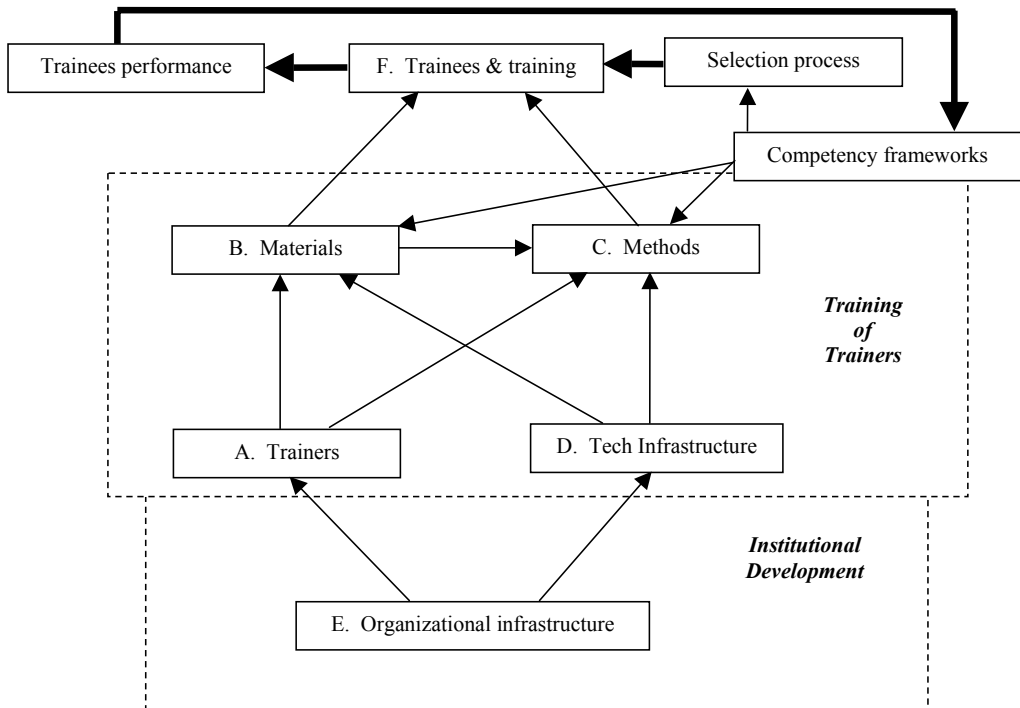


Figure 6. The Training Process with Feedback

4. The design of the training program

The design of the training program based in Bucharest has also evolved from cycle to cycle, but includes four main elements:

- Practically-oriented and classroom-based trainings, with an emphasis on the development of skills and know-how, and the application of a variety of techniques and methods to real situations through case studies, role plays or simulations and result-oriented workshops;
- Short internships (4 – 8 weeks) spent working in the institutions at central and territorial levels of the Romanian government, to provide experience of working on real issues in the public administration;
- A major group exercise, based on a complex case study, which requires teamwork that would integrate ideas and skills in order to produce a final result;
- The preparation of a personal project, based on an issue of personal interest, which could make a contribution to the public administration reform or service delivery, proving their commitment to become an agent of change which would signify their commitment as an agent of change and which would demonstrate their creativity skills.

Throughout, the program has a clear practical orientation, and it combines classroom-based activities with periods of experience in the public administration field, to enhance and accelerate the learning process.

To illustrate the wide coverage of the training program, the following subjects have been included in the curriculum of cycle 2:

- Modern human resources management;
- Public finance, taxation and budgeting systems;
- Policy making and impact evaluation;
- Public policies evaluation;
- Strategic management concepts and techniques;
- EU institutions and key concepts;
- EU policies and decision-making processes;
- EU Structural funds and project cycle management (PCM);
- Regional development policies;
- Quality of the service delivery;
- Quality management in public administration.

The program is divided in modules, each covering a main theme or topic and lasting about one week. These modules are grouped into blocks, with the four main training blocks separated by three internship programs, as illustrated in Annex 2.

Each module was prepared by a small team, at it includes at least two Romanian experts and one EU expert, selected through an open competition. Each topic was prepared in a comparative perspective, incorporating national, as well as external visions. In order to facilitate the interaction and the use of participative training methods the students were organized in groups of up to 20 people. The delivery also added EU expertise inputs to the expertise of the national trainers.

The Personal Projects was a major exercise that was included in the curriculum of the second cycle. It was a cross-cutting exercise, complementary to the classroom training and internships, which thoroughly tested the skills of the future managers. It is a project selected by each participant in the program and which was prepared during the 10- months of the program with the aim of implementing it after graduation when they would take up managerial positions within public administration.

The exercise requires each young professional (YP) to think in a project-oriented manner and to gather relevant inputs around general and operational objectives. The challenge is to build up and manage a workable action plan involving knowledge and skills translated into specific activities for a more effective implementation of the public policies. YPS are free to choose the topic of the project that should be related to public administration, and in which they would have a personal interest and toward which they would demonstrate commitment. It can be based either on personal motivation that stimulated his/her application to the YPS program or on an area of interest later developed by one of the topics presented in the modular program.

The internship program aimed to provide the intern with central and territorial administrative experience in order to prepare the future public managers with the mobility in career development, as it is the practice for civil servants of equivalent level in other European civil service systems. The placement of the interns was prepared in partnership with the National Institute of Administration and it was made according to the trainees or scholars' prioritized preferences, as far as technically and practically possible. The interns were supervised by mentors in each of the hosting institutions, and their activity was monitored by the training team.

The placement of the interns in the central administration, at the level of line or middle management, aimed to provide participants with a clearer understanding of the executive level of the central public administration. Later on, the internship program was organized within the central administration, at a higher, strategic management level in order to provide the participants with the experience of a more strategy and policy-oriented level of administration, where a longer-term vision and better estimation of upcoming issues is needed to improve the overall functioning of the administrative apparatus and the quality of the outputs and outcomes. The internship developed at territorial level was organized in prefectures, regional branches of the central government or agencies, municipalities and other local authorities. The aim was to provide the participants with a better understanding of the government activity, which is closer to the service delivery and away from the centre.

Mentoring is an important component of the overall training and development program of the public managers. Mentoring of Young Professionals during their training (while on internship) and mentoring the public managers during the early years of their career are two aspects of the same issue: how best to ensure that the Young Professional/public manager is able to learn quicker and with reduced risks, while placed in a relatively unfamiliar environment?

Mentors are selected from the managerial officers in charge of the administrative units hosting the internships. In partnership with the YPS managerial team, they organize a result-oriented internship program in their respective units and provide

guidance and support to their YP interns. Training of these mentors was provided by the National Institute of Administration.

The purpose of identifying a mentor to work with YP interns throughout their internship period is to help manage and accelerate their accommodation, training and development. The mentor complements the internship activity by providing guidance and helping the YP reinforce what he/she is learning at the working place. The mentor will also help resolve any practical problems associated with a new work placement and ensure that the YP acquires, as quickly as possible, the knowledge and the skills they need to complete his/her work tasks. The mentor for an YP is someone who would encourage, give advices and would support the development of that YP. The mentor provides practical assistance to ensure that the YP has the means to achieve their work placement objectives. They are the individual's link into the organization's culture, the norms of that culture and the long-term strategic vision. The mentor¹ also provides moral support to prevent them experiencing isolation and lack of motivation in their work placement.

Future YPS cycles may obviously choose to modify the details of the training design, in the light of past experience, to continuously improve the training quality and the learning experience. There is also likely that the design of the program to be improved from one cycle to the other; however, the general principles and standards underlying the program are expected to remain the same. Therefore, placing the training program within the context of the whole cycle, the overall design currently takes the following form, with the placement representing the start of their professional careers as public managers.

The second training component takes place in one of the other Member States of the European Union, taking the form of either twelve weeks internship in a public administration unit in the EU (Trainees) or an academic year of up to twelve months, including a short internship, at a university or school of public administration in the EU (Scholars). Placements for these internships or scholarships have been so far prepared with the strong contribution of the YPS project partners in the EU.

The EU internship refers to a twelve-week program that provides participants with practical work experience as part of the training and development program within the YPS Scheme. This form of learning helps trainees to combine classroom training with real-life practice, at EU standards, and also to prepare themselves to work effectively as public managers after graduation and to assess their future role as change agents.

The specific aim of the internship is to familiarize the YP as quickly as possible with the operational aspects of the public administration of the EU Member States, and to allow them to gain a sound understanding of how particular services are managed starting from the political to the implementation aspects. The YPs are expected to

¹ So far 162 Romanian mentors have provided support to the development of these internships. 74 of this group are mentors within the central Government. They are based in a wide range of Ministries, Institutes and Agencies. 88 of this group are mentors within the territories.

work alongside with designated professionals in the host institutions, and to assist them whenever possible, their work being guided by an agreed work-plan or terms of reference. All YP interns have been highly appreciated by their mentors for their adaptability, commitment and performance during their internship abroad. All interns reported that these programs provided excellent experience and the opportunity to develop valuable perspectives.

The EU Scholarship refers to a program of a period up to twelve-months, which provides participants with postgraduate level training and practical work experience as part of the training and development program within the YPS Scheme. The Scholarship Program helps to create a new group of civil servants by encouraging those who did not previous working experience in the public administration to apply for this program. This form of learning helps scholars to further their academic studies in the fields of public administration/public management/public service and EU affairs². The Scholarship Program provides them with the skills and knowledge to be able to analyze and compare different practices and structures of other European administrative systems and to consider how these could be adapted to the Romanian context.

Scholars are placed on high quality programs offered by a range of schools of public administration and universities within EU Member States. At least four-weeks of the twelve-month program are undertaken within a public administration institution of the host country. As with the EU Internship Program, the specific aim of this internship is to familiarize the YP as quickly as possible with the operational aspects of the administrative system of the respective Member State, and to allow them to gain a sound understanding of how particular services are managed from the political to the implementation levels. The YP is expected to work alongside with designated professionals in the host institution and, where possible, to assist them. The activity of each intern is guided by an agreed work-plan or terms of reference.

5. Conclusions

At this point, the basic assumptions about the future of the public manager system, which are built in part upon the experience of the first and second cycle, can be stated as following:

- A fast-track scheme would be retained as an important factor in stimulating public administration reform, by encouraging the entrance of “new blood” into the senior branch of the civil service;
- The best candidates for public manager status could and should be drawn from a wider variety of sources, in order to offer a varied balance of qualifications, experiences and personal aptitudes;
- The salary and the incentive systems should support this diversity, through flexibility and level, to encourage mobility of personnel between different sectors of the economy and different sectors of the government;

² These were the fields of study agreed for Cycle 2.

- Preparation for public manager candidacy should be achieved through a variety of training programs and routes, of which the YPS would be an important one (in the earlier years at least);
- The whole process of civil service selection, assessment and appraisal would be undertaken in a professional and transparent manner, and a mechanism such as the Commission for Public Managers would remain in place to ensure public confidence in the whole process.

The successive cycles of the YPS should thereby be gradually transformed into a stable and high quality program for preparing the future generations of senior civil servants, within an institutional framework, which would include both public and private sector agencies and resources. However, the normal processes of civil service training, assessment and promotion are not capable of quickly developing a significant corps of senior public managers and will need to be supplemented by new strategies, activities and resources if they are to be achieved within a relatively short time span.

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Annex 1. Summary Competency Framework for Public Managers

General Competency	Sub-Competency	Specific Competency
Delivery skills (motivation and commitment)	Drive for results	Planning and prioritizing work activities
		Proactive problem solving
		Resilience
		Accountability
	Learning and self-improvement	Learning continuously
		Adaptability
Intellectual capacity	Decision making	Analytical and critical thinking
		Taking and implementing decisions
		Taking calculated risks
	Constructive thinking	Thinking creatively
		Identifying innovative solutions
Interpersonal skills	Building productive relationships	Building relationships
		Achieving goals through relationships
	Communicating with impact	Communicating
		Influencing, negotiating and mediating
	People management	Ability to train others
Team skills	Team player	Ability to contribute in a team environment
Change Agent	Change Agent	Promotes change and thrives on change

Annex 2. Modular –Block design of the YPS training program in cycle 2

Block 1	Stage 1	Block 2	Stage 2	Block 3	Stage 3	Block 4	Final	Year 2
Modules 1,2,3	Central level	Modules 4,5,6,7	Territorial level	Modules 8,9,10	Central level	Modules 11,12,13,14	Case study	3 months stage or 12 months scholarship & personal project
	Line-management				Strategic management			

Personal project:

Identification ► outline ► preliminary work ► feedback ► main preparation ► final assessment

Each module was prepared by a small team, including at least two Romanian experts and one EU expert.