

# PUBLIC SECTOR LEADERSHIP. A REVIEW OF ROMANIAN RESEARCH DONE IN THE FIELD BETWEEN 2007-2016

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## Abstract

Leadership is one of the best examples for an ubiquitous research topic, as it is studied both as a social phenomenon as well as a theoretical concept (Hackman and Wageman, 2007), being studied in relation with different research fields, ranging from politics, public administration, management, social and organizational change, human motivation (and the list could go on). This has led some scholars to claiming that leadership has been the source of more extensive investigation than almost any other aspect of human behavior (de Vries, 1993). The interest then in public sector leadership comes only natural to any researcher in the field of public administration. Our main purpose was to identify and analyze what has been done on the topic of public sector leadership, specifically for Romania, in the past ten years. We focused on three major variables: theoretical framework used, authorship nationality, and quality of research. Results indicate that Romanian authors and Romania are missing from top tier journals in the field of public administration. Indirectly, results raise questions about general research capacity in the field of public administration of Romanian scholars.

**Keywords:** leadership, Romania, meta-analysis, public sector organizations, public management.

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## 1. Leadership in the public sector

While leadership itself is an ubiquitous research topic, this is also true for public sector leadership. On the one hand, a very broad area of research stems from the assumption that public and private are different (Rainey, 1997), thus any concepts related to organizational theory, including leadership should have these differences in mind. Secondly, (good) leadership is seen as an important driver for performance and this coupled with public sector performance being a constant topic of research and debate, questions related to what good (effective) leadership in the public sector means, how it can be developed through trainings or education only come natural in mind (Jacobsen and Andersen, 2015). Finally, leadership is indirectly linked to public sector reform, whether leaders are seen as champions of the reform process or major resistance sources, public sector reform has arguably been one of the defining features of the research and policy landscape for the past three decades (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011), with public organizations being a constant subject to rigorous and extensive management reforms (Andrews, Downe and Guarneros-Meza, 2013; Jilke and Van de Walle, 2014), while leaders are called upon to guide successfully in very tumultuous conditions.

Thus our purpose with this study is not to highlight the importance of public sector leadership, as this is self-evident, but rather to shed light on the latest researches on the topic, in the Romanian study space. We chose to focus only on researches done on public sector leadership in Romania because of two major reasons: 1) it seems that Romanian academics struggle to publish their works in top ranking journals in other fields (see Bulai *et al.* 2016, for the field of economics), and we want to test whether this is the case for leadership studies; 2) there is very little empirical data on public sector leadership in Romania.

Consequently, our main research questions are: a) What are the main theoretical frameworks/theories used for public sector leadership research in Romania in the last 10 years?; b) How much of this research is done by Romanian authors?; What is the quality level of these efforts?

## 2. Methods

Document analysis was the main tool used to gather data. We set up a multi-criteria selection and analysis process. The data search and gathering was done only on online platforms, mostly because of convenience use but also based on the exponential growth of the online environment and ever-increasing importance it has in facilitating access and increasing visibility of research efforts (Balaban *et al.*, 2016). A first set of criteria was used for article search and selection, as portrayed in Table 1.

The data collection was done in two phases. The first phase involved an analysis of top international journals in the field of public administration positioned in the first

**Table 1:** Criteria for search, selection and analysis

Keywords (search)	Abstract analysis	Article analysis criteria
Public + leadership + Romania <i>If no result returned</i> Leadership + Romania	Condition for selection: Topic= Leadership Sector of analysis= Public Country = Romania (including comparative studies) Period: 2007-2016	Theoretical framework used Type of study – empirical/theoretical Methodology used Leadership descriptors Results

**Source:** Authors' own compilation

two quartiles (top 50%) as classified by the VEFISCDI<sup>1</sup>. We selected 6 journals from the total of 24 journals that met the top 50% threshold, mostly based on the notoriety and link between the name of the journal and the topic of leadership. The journals selected are:

- Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory;
- Public Administration Review;
- Public Administration;
- Review of Public Personnel Administration;
- International Public Management Journal; and
- Public Management Review.

We used the combination of the three keywords (public + leadership + Romania) as search criteria, in each of the journals. In case of no results, we renewed the search using only 2 keywords (leadership + Romania). The search was done on the website of each journal either using the general search engine available or, where it was possible, also using the advanced search option for more refined results.

### 3. Results

For the first phase of the project the final results indicate there were no articles published in the last 10 years on the topic of public sector leadership in top tier journals in the field of public administration by Romanian authors. Detailed results of what the actual search online turned out are presented in Table 2.

The main takeaways from the first phase of the research are that public leadership in Romania is basically absent as a research subject in the top journals, in the field of public administration. Even where articles turned out with the 2 keywords search, none of them were focused on Romania, and very few (3) dealt with leadership in the public sector. This lack of results in top journals is explored in the discussion section of the article.

<sup>1</sup> The document represents the Thomson Journal Citation Report (2015) as published by VEFISCDI, classified on field of study and impact factor. The ranking is available online at the following address: [http://uefiscdi.gov.ro/userfiles/file/PREMIERE\\_ARTICOLE/ARTICOLE%202016/Clasament%20IF%202015.pdf](http://uefiscdi.gov.ro/userfiles/file/PREMIERE_ARTICOLE/ARTICOLE%202016/Clasament%20IF%202015.pdf).

**Table 2:** Results of search on public sector leadership in top tier public administration journals

Journal	3 keywords search results	2 keywords search results	Articles that meet criteria for selection
Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory	1	1 (the same)	0 – Does not deal with leadership in Romania
Public Administration Review	0	3	0 – no article deals with leadership in Romania (or with leadership as primary topic)
Public Administration	0	7	0 – no article deals with leadership in Romania, and only two articles have a section dedicated to leadership
Review of Public Personnel Administration	0	0	–
International Public Management Journal	0	1	0 – no article deals with leadership in Romania or with leadership
Public Management Review	7	6	0 – no article deals with leadership in Romania. Only one article has a section dedicated to (political) leadership. Articles turned up because of use of 'public' as keyword. One was published before 2007.

**Source:** Authors' own compilation

In the second phase of the research, we applied the same set of criteria for search, selection and analysis but now using Google Scholar. The procedure remained the same, with public + leadership + Romania being the initial combination, and then trying out the search with just two keywords. We gathered the results of the first seven pages displayed by Google Scholar. The results of the data collection in the second phase are featured in Table 3 (below):

**Table 3:** Articles identified and selected through Google Scholar search engine

No. of articles turned up by Google Scholar	No. of articles that meet the selection criteria
22	12

**Source:** Authors' own compilation

The main reasons for dropping 10 out of the 22 articles are: no focus on the public sector (4), not focused directly on leadership (3), out of date (3). For the articles that passed the abstract analysis phase and were selected, we performed a thorough content analysis; the results are summarized in Table 4.

## 4. Discussion

Our purpose with this study was to offer a clear image on the state of research on the topic of public sector leadership. We raised the following research questions: a) What are the main theoretical frameworks/theories used for public sector leadership research in Romania in the last 10 years?; b) How much of this research is done by Romanian authors?; What is the quality level of these efforts?

### 4.1. Theoretical frameworks

Interestingly enough, the most common framework used is that of transformational leadership, 6 out of 12 articles choosing this as the supporting theory for the

**Table 4:** Document analysis on articles published between 2007 and 2016 on the topic of public sector leadership

Title of article	Theoretical model	Type of study (Empirical/Theoretical)	Methodology	Relevant observations
1. Fein, Tziner and Vasiliu (2010)	Transformational/ Transactional leadership	Empirical	Survey on 324 managers. Instrument: LBDQ XII	Transformational leadership is seen more desirable by managers (compared to transactional) females displayed a preference for higher levels of transformational leadership behaviors relative to men. Managers 35 years old and older showed a higher preference for transformational leadership than those of 34 years and lower.
2. Manole and Alpogi (2015)	Not mentioned (for leadership)	Empirical	Survey on 35 civil servants in one organization	The study is focused on civil servants relations and appreciation of work with other colleagues. It uses these results to make inferences about characteristics of leaders. Empirical evidence for the claims are weak.
3. Hamlin and Patel (2012)	Implicit Leadership Theory (ILT) and the Multiple-Contingency Model (MC)	Empirical	Collecting critical incidents (CIT, Flanagan, 1954) – 252 CIs & Multiple cross-case/cross-nation comparative analysis	Managerial and leadership effectiveness seems to be perceived and judged in much the same way in both Romania and Great Britain (in hospitals). Results support the idea of a more universal leader behaviors and universal management/leadership styles, and suggests the concept of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness is far more universal across different countries.
4. Macarie, Hintea and Mora (2011)	Not mentioned (for leadership)	Empirical	Survey among women managers	Gender appears to influence both leadership style and culture, although results are based on self-ratings (of women managers). Presence of women in top management of public organizations is low, average (at best) for middle management. Limitations mostly related to unknown sample size and bias because of self-reporting.
5. Gherghină, Chiru and Pop (2011)	Multiple criteria leadership selection**	Empirical	Document analysis	Focus on leadership selection criteria used by Romanian political parties. Rigid and centralized selection process for all parties with the exception PNL and UDMR, which display more open competition starting from 2005. Lack of reforms towards increased involvement of members in the decision making and absence of bottom up processes in party leadership selection.
6. Mora and Țicău (2012)	Transformational leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1994, 1999)	Empirical	Survey with MLQ5X, pilot study, 4 leaders/23 subordinates	Predominant leadership style is a mix between transformational and transactional and far less laissez-faire. Type of institution (as an independent variable) seems to influence leadership style. Results cannot be generalized, valid, at best, for the 4 institutions analyzed.
7. Raus, Haita and Lazăr (2012)	Behavioral/ Leadership Style theory (Lewin, Lipitt, White, 1939) + Maslow needs theory (1987)	Empirical	Survey among police school employees 86 (81% of total employees)	No correlation between leadership style and individual needs. Actual position in the organization seems to influence the needs expressed by respondents. Multiple correlations between styles themselves and also needs are done, but hard to understand why. Results cannot be generalized.

\* CIs=Critical Incidents

\*\* It's a unique design constructed based on several individual criteria found in the research literature

Title of article	Theoretical model	Type of study (Empirical/Theoretical)	Methodology	Relevant observations
8. Hîrteș, Mora and Țiclău (2009)	Behavioral leadership theory (Blake, Mouton, 1964) + Organizational culture (OCAI)	Theoretical Empirical	Managerial Grid + OCAI. Survey among leaders and employees of a hospital. 78 respondents out of 340	Mismatch between type of leadership practiced and organizational culture. Dominant culture hierarchic with a preference for clan culture. Dominant leadership style – team leader. Results cannot be generalized.
9. Stănescu and Roșca (2010), Stănescu and Ciceș (2012“)	Transformational leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1994, 1999)	Empirical	Survey among 101 managers enrolled in YPS program. Instrument MLQ5X	Highest scores obtained on transformational scale, followed by transactional and passive. Scores are not compared with the scientific standard, thus it is difficult to put results into context. Purely descriptive character of the study. Results cannot be generalized.
10. Mora (2012)	Transformational leadership	Theoretical	Theoretical analysis. Document analysis	Focus on relevance of transformational leadership in the Romanian educational system. Theoretical proposal: transformational leaders as agents of change/reform. Starting assumption: Romanian educational system has major flaws and is in need of comprehensive reform, transformational leaders could be champions of reform. Does not take into consideration complexity of the system.
11. Rus (2012)	Transformational leadership	Empirical	Comparative study: public vs private. 4 instruments used: LBDO-XII (Stogdill, 1963), MLQ5X (Bass and Avolio, 1994), Index of organizational reactions (Smifn, 1983); Productivity Rating Scale. 160 respondents	Link between transformational leadership and employee satisfaction, productivity in a comparative manner (two organizations). Transformational leadership is correlated with both higher productivity and satisfaction. Results cannot be generalized.

\*\*\* Same authors published another paper in 2012, but based on the same research. We counted both articles but displayed them in the same row in Table 4.

**Source:** Authors' own compilation

leadership concept. There are several reasons why this was (somewhat) to be expected. The first one is the popularity of the theory. Judge and Piccolo (2004) found that a 'search of keywords in materials published from 1990 to 2003 in the PsycINFO database revealed that there have been more studies on transformational or charismatic leadership than on all other popular theories of leadership (e.g., least preferred coworker theory, path-goal theory, normative decision theory, substitutes for leadership) combined' (p. 756). The same was found by Lowe and Gardner (2000) in their meta-analysis of published work in *Leadership Quarterly* – charismatic/transformational leadership paradigm was the most researched area of leadership over the last decade, surpassing attention given to all other leadership paradigms. The second reason (for transformational leadership being so popular) is the increase in the rate of change both in business and public sector, most important factors being new technology, globalization, complexity, social factors (Tetenbaum, 19998; McMillan, 2004), thus making a strong case for a leadership model able to deliver both high performance and be a catalyst for change. The rest of the articles, either did not have a clear theoretical frame in place for leadership (2), or used behavioral or style theories (2) (one using Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid (1964), and the other Lewin *et al.* (1939) three type leadership model).

#### 4.2. Authorship

Looking at both phases of our research we can draw the following conclusions. 1) Both Romania and Romanian authors are absent from top tier journals in the field, concerning the topic of public sector leadership. It is difficult to understand what the cause of this situation is, but it should draw some attention regarding the quality of research done in this field in Romania. 2) Based on the second phase of the research, as expected, most articles (10 out of 12) are written by Romanian authors, with the last two, one being a collaboration which includes a Romanian author and only one article being authored solely by foreign researchers. Even though it was not our initial objective, some attention should be given to both the ranking and country of origin of the journals, as we use this as proxy indicators of quality. 9 out of 12 articles were published in Romanian (international) journals, with 12 being the highest H index score for a journal (top ranking journals<sup>2</sup> reaching scores of over 70). From these 9, 2 were published in journals or proceedings that did not have an H index rating, while the others were split between two journals with an H index of 7 (4 articles) and 12 respectively (2 articles). 3 of the articles were published in foreign journals, two from the UK and one from the US, with all three having H index scores of above 20 (see Table 5).

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2 We refer to *Public Administration Review* (PAR) and *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (JPART).

**Table 5:** Classification of articles based on journal ranking

Title of article	Journal/Editor	H index (higher is better) <sup>*</sup>	Country (of journal publisher)
1. Fein, Tziner and Vasiliu (2010)	Journal of Management Development (Emerald)	30	UK
2. Manole and Alpopi (2015)	Management Research and Practice (ASE Bucharest)	Not ranked	Romania
3. Hamlin and Patel (2012)	European Journal of Training and Development (Emerald)	23	UK
4. Macarie, Hințea and Mora (2011)	Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences (Babes-Bolyai University)	7	Romania
5. Gherghină, Chiru and Pop (2011)	East European Politics & Societies (SAGE)	27	USA
6. Mora and Țiclău (2012)	Revista de Cercetare și Intervenție Socială (Expert Project Pub.)	12	Romania
7. Raus, Haita and Lazăr, (2012)	Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences (Babes-Bolyai University)	7	Romania
8. Hințea, Mora and Țiclău (2009)	Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences (Babes-Bolyai University)	7	Romania
9. Stănescu and Roșca (2010)	Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations (College of Communication and Public Relations)	Not ranked	Romania
10. Stănescu and Cicei (2012)	Revista de Cercetare și Intervenție Socială (Expert Project Pub.)	12	Romania
11. Mora (2012)	Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences (Babes-Bolyai University)	7	Romania
12. Rus (2012)	The EIRP Proceedings (Danubius University)	Not ranked	Romania

\* Rankings done on <http://www.scimagojr.com/>

**Source:** Authors' own compilation

### 4.3 Topics covered and quality of research

As mentioned before, half of the articles used the transformational leadership theory, and in most cases tried to explain specific variables like – motivation, satisfaction, productivity, needs fulfillment – through leadership style. Results of these researches indicate that in general transformational leadership seems to have a positive impact on all these variables, somewhat in line with existing research. Two articles analyzed leadership in a broader context of gender studies – one focusing on female representation in leadership positions (Macarie, Hințea and Mora, 2011), and the other on how gender influences leadership perception (Fein, Tziner and Vasiliu, 2010). There was one comparative study (Hamlin and Patel, 2012) focused more on analyzing the universal character of leadership behavior in crisis situation. Another study (Hințea, Mora and Țiclău, 2009) analyzed the link between leadership and culture, while the last one focused on selection criteria used by political parties for top leadership positions. With regards to quality of the research the first issue noticed is the small number of respondents in all of the studies, which makes any kind of generalizations regarding the actual results scientifically impossible. In four studies the number of respondents is below 100, three studies have between 101 and 160 respondents, while the highest number is 324 (Fein, Tziner and Vasiliu, 2010). The other four have used either document analysis, are purely theoretical or used a

methodology that was not based on survey. This fact should raise questions about the individual but also institutional capacity to do relevant research on this topic by Romanian researchers. In 2014 governmental financing for R&D from the national budget dropped from 0.48% (2012) of GDP to approx. 0.38% of GDP in 2014<sup>3</sup>; Romania also has one of the lowest values of business R&D expenditure in the EU (0.16 % of GDP in 2014, 27<sup>th</sup> in the EU) (European Commission, 2016); another indicator of this is the 'low quality of the Romanian science base which is evidenced by the share of Romanian scientific publications among the 10% of the most-cited worldwide publications, where Romania ranks 25<sup>th</sup> among all EU Member States' (European Commission, 2016, p. 41). There is a striking paradox, with a recent study (Buhai *et al.*, 2016), admittedly focused only in the field of economics, highlighting that: '1) over 99% of (the hundreds of) domestic full professors do not pass minimum international standards for tenure at any of the top 500 universities in any global Economic rankings; 2) over 99% of the 'research output' of these domestic full professors in Economic Sciences is published in outlets completely irrelevant for any evaluation or promotion purposes outside Romania; and 3) Economics Nobel, John Bates Clark, and Yrjö Jahnsson awardees would not pass the current minimal national criteria for qualification as professors in Economic Sciences' (Buhai *et al.*, 2016, p. 2). This raises serious questions about how performance (in research) is understood and evaluated.

Finally, we should add that, even though all, with the exception of one study, had empirical research, because of methodological issues (mostly sampling but not exclusively) the actual scientific quality of the results and the possibility of both generalization or replication of the studies is low, which in turn means relatively low relevance and added value to the field of public administration. Moreover, the phenomenon highlighted above, was confirmed in our study, as the articles written by foreign authors and published in better ranking journals had cleaner and better quality methodology overall.

## 5. Conclusions

Although our research is limited, based on the data gathered we can draw a series of general conclusions:

1. Romania is absent from top level research in the field of public sector leadership – both as a topic of study but also regarding Romanian authors publishing in top ranking journals in the field.
2. The general quality of the research actually published is average at best, with major issues related to the methodology used, especially low samples that hinder the possibility of generalization of research results, and implicitly reduce overall relevance of the research.

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3 Data from EUROSTAT, available online at [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&nit=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=t2020\\_20&tableSelection=1](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&nit=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=t2020_20&tableSelection=1)

3. Overall results signal a broader concern regarding general research capacity of Romanian researchers in the field of public administration and how performance is defined and measured.
4. The most common theoretical frame used for this type of studies seems to be that of transformational leadership; there is a need for designs that include other variables like power distribution, general context (situational variables) and organizational complexity, to offer a more broad perspective on the topic.

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