

ANALYSIS OF THE PUBLIC SERVANTS' NEEDS. CASE STUDY: ROMANIA, THE NORTH-WEST REGION

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Abstract

Considering that individuals can fulfill some of their needs at the workplace, we may assume that, from the moment people choose a job, they are oriented toward those organizations that ease needs' satisfaction and quitting that job is less likely when the dominant work needs are met. This paper aims to identify and analyze the needs of public servants from the North-West Region of Romania. The research was conducted in two distinct parts: the identification of needs was made using interviews and the analysis was based on data collected by self-administrated questionnaires. Specific needs of public servants were identified, along with general needs which are expressed by employees from other sectors. 77 needs were analyzed and they were grouped in 22 dimensions following the application of a questionnaire to 343 employees. The results showed that there are three major needs that public servants have namely the need for an optimal organizational climate, the need to have a career and the need to have specific work characteristics.

1. Introduction

Considering that individuals can satisfy some of their needs at the workplace, we may assume that, from the moment people choose a job, they are oriented toward those organizations that ease needs' satisfaction and quitting that job is less likely when the dominant work needs are met. In this paper, we analyze the work needs of public servants from the North-Western Region of Romania in a context of public administration reform. We considered such a study to be necessary due to the small number of researches regarding work needs of this category, most of them underlining employees' motivation and motivation techniques that should be used by managers.

After decades from the emergence of the first theories regarding needs and after many researches, the employees' needs were no longer such an interesting issue, and researchers were more preoccupied by some elements that influence employees' motivation (e.g. equity perception) or the factors that may increase performance (e.g. difficult goal setting). Nevertheless, at the end of the 20th century, needs recaptured the attention of researchers, along with analyses of the work environment.

Also, there was an increased interest regarding differences in needs for different categories of employees (e.g. differences between the needs of public and private employees) and more, a new theory has emerged – a theory regarding specific needs of public sector employees.

Because we wanted to identify and analyze public servants' needs, our research was conducted in two stages – first we identified the needs using interviews and second we applied a questionnaire. We wanted to identify specific needs of public servants, along with general work related needs.

The questions addressed in this paper are:

- What are the needs of public servants?
- Which of public servants' needs are more important to them?
- Is there a model that allows us to group these needs?

2. Needs, values and motivation

Each employee is motivated one way or another at work. Each of us chooses an activity domain or institution/organization where we feel that we have the opportunities to meet our work needs.

Initial motivation theories emphasized individuals' needs, but after a few decades there was a decrease in this approach. Even if some decades after Maslow's theory (1943) or those of Murray (1938), Alderfer (1969), McClelland (1961), Herzberg *et al.* (1959), many affirmed that needs theories are obsolete, there are debates about the character of needs or their classifications. In our opinion, the work needs of individuals remain a very important element in motivation, a key element that, if ignored, leads to a misunderstanding of employees' behavior. Work motivation is a complex issue, and it is influenced by both internal and external factors.

During time, work motivation was approached in many ways as a result of different aspects considered essential to individuals' motivation. While some motivation theories

have taken into account personal characteristics when trying to explain behavior, others underlined the importance of the environment in motivation. The problem, in the latter case, represents the fact that individuals were considered to be a rather passive element. Starting with Lewin's equation $B=f(P,E)$ (B represents behavior, P person and E environment) and his affirmation that in order to understand individuals' behavior we should consider both individual differences and the environment (Lewin, 1936), it was clear that in explaining behavior we need to analyze both individual and environmental factors.

Explanations regarding motivation have changed over time, evolving from simple models to more and more complex models, where many elements, other than needs, are taken into account. We have to consider many factors when explaining employees' behavior – physiological and psychological needs of individuals, traits, values, culture, job characteristics, goals, rewards and incentives (Latham, 2007).

Still, in our opinion, for improving outcomes (in our case those of the public sector) we should first focus on the main work related needs. These needs are influenced by societal values and the type of organization where individuals work. Ronen's scheme (Figure 1) captures the relationships between needs, values and motivation and the role of occupation, environment and organization in the entire process. Because our research was conducted in public institutions we want to analyze particular work needs of public sector employees (public sector motivation - PSM)¹ along with other work needs.

Some organizational features influence the needs of their members; and needs are not independent (no man is an island), they are “born”, expressed and more or less fulfilled in a particular context.

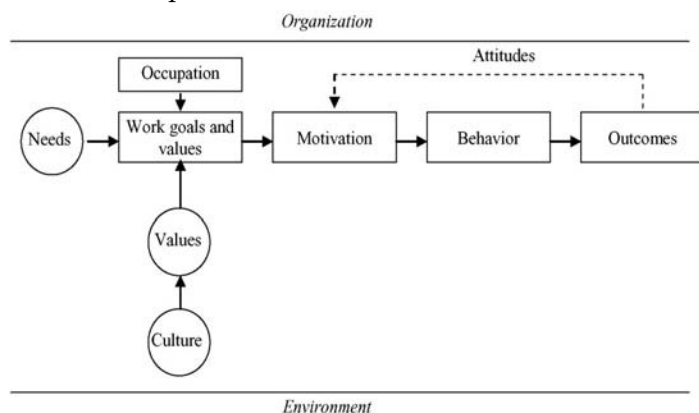


Figure 1: Ronen Scheme
Source: Ronen, 1986, p. 137

1 Perry and Wise (1990) claim that there is a specific motivation of public sector employees, which represents the predisposition of an individual to respond to motives specific to public organizations. These motives or needs may be grouped in three categories – rational (instrumental, regarding participation in the process of policy formulation, commitment to a public program because of personal identification, advocacy for a special or private interest), norm based (a desire to serve public interest, loyalty or duty to the government, social equity) and affective (commitment to a program from a conviction about its social importance, patriotism or benevolence).

There is no consensus regarding an exact definition of needs (Sheldon, 2001), and therefore there are many classifications of needs, and their approach differs depending on the interest area of the researcher or on the unit of analysis. There is also no consensus regarding the character of needs; for some authors, needs are universal, innate while others consider them relative.

During the 20th century, there were some debates regarding human basic needs, their universality or objectivity. It was assumed that individuals have the same basic needs, and starting from this point of view there were different classifications of needs – Maslow (1943), Alderfer (1969), Deci and Ryan (1985), Max-Neef *et al.* (1991), Doyal and Gough (1991) etc. Besides these universal needs, there are needs that differ from one individual to the other, from one society to another or in time. These needs are instrumental or intermediate and refer to ways in which people choose to meet their fundamental needs.

Work related needs may also differ from individual to individual, and the way we choose to meet our needs. Needs influence individuals' behavior at the workplace – for some growth needs, achievement needs, equity or avoiding a failure are more important. Sometimes individual needs may be in conflict, meeting one need may endanger the opportunity to meet some other important need (power needs may endanger the opportunity to meet affiliation needs). In these situations, individuals will try to meet the needs that are more important to them.

Need theories define human needs as states of tension or disequilibrium that induce an individual to act in order to eliminate this tension. The individual will decide what exactly will meet his/her need and will choose a course of action for that end. Human behavior is motivated by unsatisfied needs (Pinder, 1984). Need represents an internal disequilibrium state, a deficiency (Steers and Porter 1991); an unsatisfied need will create tension and thus a behavior to find a goal, a way to reduce that tension and satisfy the need (Robbins, 1996). For Henry Murray (1938) a need is a force within an organism, a potentiality or readiness to respond in a certain way under certain given circumstances, the immediate outcome of certain internal and external occurrences.

Values are also elements that influence individuals' behavior. People prefer to work with other people who have similar values, and choose jobs and organizations where they do not have to act against their values.

Values refer to cognitive representations and transformations of needs (Rokeach, 1973), and they mediate between needs, goals and intentions (Locke, 1991). If needs exist at biological and cognitive level, values are exclusively cognitive (Locke, 1991) and needs may be transformed into goals only through values.

Work related values may be associated with work content (achievement, challenge) and work context (remuneration, job security and working conditions). Along with intrinsic or extrinsic values, there are also differences between cognitive values (recognition), instrumental values (benefits) or affective values (relationships).

In general, the needs or values of employees were measured using the self-administered questionnaire. Thus, many instruments were developed in an attempt to analyze different needs of employees and their importance.

In Romania, the research of values revealed few data. Inglehart and Wenzel (2005), based on the World Values Survey's results placed Romania on the value map in an area dominated by survival values (mainly material values) and with the most traditional values among former communist countries (such as the importance of family or respect of authority).

Family represents the most important thing for Romanians (European Values Survey, 2008; World Values Survey, 2005). Work is placed second, with a small advantage compared to religion in 2008 (in 2005 the situation was reversed).

From the analysis of the most important job related factors (European Values Survey, 2008) we may observe that the material factor (survival values) is on the first place followed by the relationships with colleagues. Comşa (2009), interpreting these results, found an extrinsic orientation at the level of the entire society, with a tendency of the more educated persons, with more subordinates and a better status, to be intrinsic oriented.

From the Public Opinion Barometer (November 2005), which (also) included questions from the World Values Survey, with similar results regarding the most important work related factors (even if some of the questions had different formulations), we find that 40.1% consider salary as the most important factor, 26.1% prefer a secure job, 16.2% desire a correspondence between work/job and his/her abilities, and 10.3% want to have an opportunity to achieve something at work. A much smaller percentage (maximum 2.1%) mention an interesting work, respect, responsibilities, the opportunity to have initiative, working program or holidays.

Based on the same results, we see that we have no significant differences regarding the importance of work needs between the public sector employees and private sector employees.

3. Public Servants' Needs Analysis

3.1. Methodology

Our research was conducted in two steps – one regarding the identification of needs, and a second one focused on the analysis of these needs.

For the first part, needs identification, an interview based on a semi-structured interview guide was used. Interviews were taken in June 2007 in Bistrița-Năsăud County, from 24 public servants, from both urban – Bistrița city – and rural environment.

The interview guide consisted of seven questions trying to identify the initial motivation for choosing the workplace (and if Public Sector Motivation is present) and also to identify the work related needs according to Herzberg's model.

General factors were identified, factors which are determining attitudes towards work and workplaces (and, accordingly, the needs – satisfied or not) such as responsibility,

work itself, work conditions, appreciation, compensation, supervision, work relationships, and also specific needs for public servants regarding career, promotion system, plurality of office, the image of public institutions and public servants, less involvement of politics in administration or the need for a clear legislative framework.

In order to analyze work needs we conducted a survey among public servants from the North-West Region. The objectives were:

- To identify the most important needs;
- To assess the effect of different socio-demographical or work-related variables on the perceived importance of needs; and
- To categorize needs into major types of needs.

Sampling was made in two stages. In the first one, institutions were selected. Local public administration institutions were preferred, and among city-halls only those from county capitals were selected. The second stage was based on a random selection of three public servants from each bureau or office of the institutions.

Data collection took place from May 26th to June 4th 2010 in local public institutions (city halls, county councils and prefectures) from Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Sălaj and Satu-Mare counties.

951 public servants were asked to answer the survey, 612 questionnaires were distributed and 369 were returned. Among these, 26 were excluded after verifications, resulting in 343 valid questionnaires, giving us a response rate of 36.06%.

Based on the interview phase, and also on existing theoretical models, we included 19 questions in the questionnaire:

- The first question regards the priorities in each public servant's life – the importance of family, work, leisure, religion and friends;
- The second one regards the measure in which certain work-related aspects are common at their workplace – 77 items grouped on 22 dimensions were included;
- The third question was about the importance of each factor for each individual (the same 77 items);
- Questions 4-17 regard socio-demographical or work-related aspects;
- Question 18 refers to the degree in which income can cover different necessities; and,
- The last question regards work satisfaction.

For the second and third questions, each respondent had to attach a grade for each item from 1 – not important at all to 10 – extremely important.

3.2. Main findings

In the following table we can find the most important ten needs of public servants. We can remark that the most important needs are those related to income (instrumental – the possibility to have a decent life – or equity and in absolute value). A clear legislative framework is also found to be very important considering the difficulties that public servants meet in their work, when applying laws in continuous

Table 1: Public servants' most important needs

	Need	N	Mean	Standard deviation
1.	My income allows me to have a decent life.	336	9.20	1.51
2.	A clear legislative framework	342	8.95	1.54
3.	My boss should be competent.	340	8.94	1.49
4.	My superior should be correct.	341	8.86	1.64
5.	To have a good salary	341	8.85	1.46
6.	To have a stable workplace	342	8.84	1.74
7.	Promotion to be based on merit	336	8.80	1.58
8.	Personnel evaluation should be fair.	341	8.77	1.55
9.	My income should be similar to those of colleagues with the same seniority and studies.	336	8.74	1.87
10.	Hiring should be based on competence.	341	8.73	1.57

change. The relationship with the immediate superior is very important – thus the need to have a competent and correct supervisor. The procedures related to promotion, evaluation and hiring are also seen as very important, along with stability.

We tried to see the degree in which needs (the most important 10) are influenced by socio-demographical or work-related factors. Two different procedures were applied – comparing means and comparing ranks.

After comparing means we saw that significant differences were met considering the county (in nine out of ten needs). Other factors such as sex, position and work type explain to a lesser extent differences in the perceived importance of needs.

The last school graduated influences the importance of four needs - income allows a decent life, income should be similar to that of colleagues with the same seniority and education, a competent superior, and competence based hiring. The domain of the studies does not influence the importance of any need – a possible explanation being that we have found in the same position and with the same responsibilities people with very different educational backgrounds.

The type of institution influences five needs - a clear legislative framework, competence based hiring, a good salary, a correct superior, and fair personnel evaluation.

Age influences only three needs - a clear legislative framework, competent superior, and correct superior.

There are certain differences regarding the needs' ranking between different groups of public servants.

For those in management positions stability, promotions and a better salary are less important. Instead, needs regarding the respect of their job responsibilities, control over things related to work and the need to have similar income with other similar people from both within and outside the institution are becoming more important.

The differences between people working in three different types of institutions are quite small – along the ten most important needs, other needs, as competence or, in the case of city halls, autonomy can appear.

Considering public servants' level of education, differences show up in the case of high-school graduates who consider as being more important needs as order or prestige and in the case of PhD employees – where we have the need for recognition and public sector motivation.

In the case of counties we do not have major differences, apart from the need of eight hours program for public servants from Satu-Mare, or the need for appreciation from the superior in the case of those from Sălaj.

For the 77 items, along with the most important ten needs, we considered necessary to take a look at the least important needs.

Table 2: Least important needs

	Need	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.	To have less paperwork	341	1.00	10.00	5.97	2.49
2.	To have authority over others	341	.00	10.00	6.04	2.94
3.	To spend time with colleagues outside work	340	1.00	10.00	6.10	2.50
4.	Work to be relatively easy	341	1.00	10.00	6.39	2.22
5.	To have responsibility for others' work	340	1.00	10.00	6.46	2.44
6.	To make decisions for others	341	1.00	10.00	6.51	2.17
7.	Work should help to establish new connections.	341	1.00	10.00	6.51	2.39
8.	Work supposes assuming risks.	340	1.00	10.00	6.53	2.44
9.	Workplace close to home	341	1.00	10.00	6.76	2.29
10.	More responsibility	341	1.00	10.00	6.93	2.36

We tried to measure the relationship between the importance of needs and the degree in which they are satisfied. A graphical representation shows that we have a significant and moderate relationship ($r=0.489$, significant at $p<0.01$)

The relationship is positive, showing that the more satisfied a need is, the more important it becomes. This is not true for all needs – there are no significant relationships in the case of income (both in absolute value or instrumental), or regarding the need for a clear legislative framework.

With regard to satisfaction, public servants consider that they perform a quality work, in a respected institution, they reported good relations with their superiors (who are correct and competent) and colleagues. Problems occur when exterior factors (from outside the group or organization) interfere. Their work is not considered to be easy, with little paperwork or stress – as a consequence, they complain about wages and promotion opportunities. At the same time, they have little authority and are not involved in decision-making.

Because many of the analyzed needs have similar values, we wanted to obtain an aggregate picture, by grouping needs into dimensions.

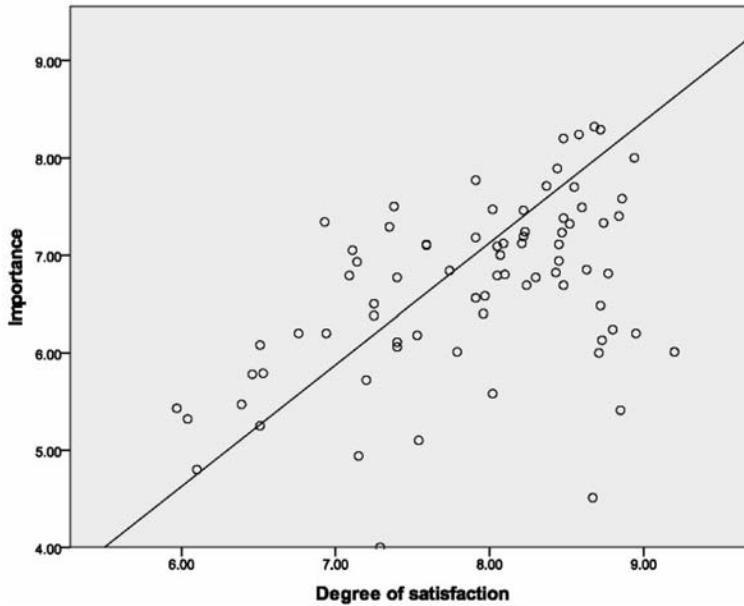


Figure 2: Importance of needs and degree of satisfaction

Table 3: Means for dimensions

	Dimensions	N	Mean	Standard deviation
1.	Stability	342	8.84	1.74
2.	Procedural justice	336	8.70	1.25
3.	Competence	336	8.67	1.32
4.	Work context	334	8.58	1.19
5.	Distributive justice	335	8.46	1.39
6.	Financial rewards	335	8.45	1.31
7.	Supervision	335	8.35	1.23
8.	Order	336	8.10	1.26
9.	Appreciation	341	8.09	1.21
10.	Private life	341	8.07	1.98
11.	Promotion	339	8.02	2.08
12.	Personal development	341	8.01	1.50
13.	Prestige	336	7.89	1.40
14.	Attractiveness	339	7.81	1.37
15.	PSM	333	7.78	1.43
16.	Accomplishment	340	7.38	1.74
17.	Work conditions	341	7.35	1.63
18.	Affiliation	339	7.12	1.43
19.	Responsibility	337	6.86	1.87
20.	Difficulty	340	6.64	1.71
21.	Power	340	6.51	1.97
22.	Autonomy	341	6.35	0.91

We wanted to reduce the number of factors in the analysis by grouping different needs in major types of needs. Some dimensions contain one variable (stability) and others several variables, trying to measure complex concepts (as in the case of public sector motivation). In other cases, for certain needs their importance could not be found by using only one direct question (as in the case of supervision).

We found that public servants need a stable workplace in which to be treated fairly and to be able to fulfill their duties – by having all the means necessary (including clear regulations).

Public servants need to a lesser extent autonomy (actually they need to consult their supervisors even with respect to the smallest details), power and responsibility. They are not searching for an easier job.

Factors like gender, position, type of institution, county, level and domain of studies or age have only in few cases significant influence over the importance of dimensions, even in these cases differences are small, indicating homogeneity of respondents. Seniority (in institution or in work) has no influence over any dimension.

3.3. Classification of needs

In order to see to what degree the number of factors can be reduced, we may use several procedures. First, we used a multi-dimensional scaling procedure on the 77 items (N1-N77). With ALSCAL scaling we can see that data is distorted (Kruskal stress coefficient is 0.32).

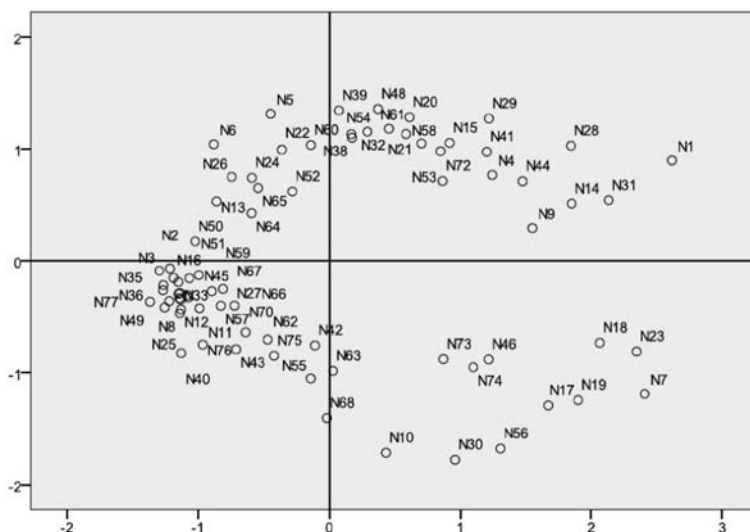


Figure 3: Needs in bi-dimensional space

Better results were obtained using a factorial analysis in which we took into account the dimensions.

Using principal component analysis we obtained Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin coefficient of 0.934 and Bartlett’s test of sphericity 0.000. Both are showing that exploratory

factorial analysis is adequate for our data. Three factors were extracted, explaining 48.0%, 10.14% and 6.51% of the total variance.

An oblique rotation using the PROMAX method provided us with the loadings for each factor.

Table 4: Component loading for each variable

	Component		
	1	2	3
Financial rewards	.526		.349
Distributive justice	.865		
Procedural justice	.905		
Order	.722		.204
Promotion	.266	.411	
Stability	.720	-.271	
Affiliation		.470	.470
Personal development	.542	.352	
Autonomy	.481	.202	
Appreciation	.594	.384	
Work conditions			.741
Supervision	.869		
Power	-.265	.907	
Accomplishment		.952	
Prestige	.246	.609	
PSM	.308	.694	
Competence	.996		
Work context	.896		
Attractiveness	.285	.615	
Difficulty			.932
Responsibility	-.267	1.017	
Private life	.463		

Factor 1 is close to what is called *Organizational Climate* – the configuration of behaviors, attitudes and feelings that characterize organizational life. Public servants need an optimal climate.

Factor 2 contains needs to achieve new responsibilities, to be better than others, to gain power and prestige, to have an interesting work which asks for creativity and permits to help others. Basically these are *Career* related needs.

Factor 3 contains *Work Characteristics* – if it is an easy workplace, workload is adequate, if the work environment is comfortable or if there are dangers in doing the job.

Thus we see that there are three major needs – to have an optimal organizational climate, to have a career and a work with specific characteristics (not necessarily easy or hard). The first one is the most important for all public servants. Career is

more important for those who have or want to have managerial positions. Work characteristics may become important only when needs are not satisfied (as when work is too hard or too dangerous).

4. Conclusions

The few differences make us to view the respondents as a homogenous group, with similar needs. Size of organization, type of activity, gender or education did not influence to a large extent the needs of public servants from the institutions where we conducted the research. This homogeneity is not a result of some sector particularity but of the degree in which these organizations are imbued by prevalent societal values.

At the formal level in the last twelve years we had a lot of changes in the regime of public service. Due to the lack of coherence and to the mismatch of many reform measures with values and culture of public institutions real change was less significant. Actually, many reform measures were taken without a serious investigation of public servants needs and thus failed to improve their motivation and finally the outcomes of the public sector.

In the conditions in which the most important needs of public servants are related to the organizational climate, this aspect should be addressed in the context of reforms. There is little change without changing the organizational climate. The reform should be bottom-up, encouraging institutions to reform themselves.

New research should be done in investigating the elements of organizational climate and of the ways in which it can be changed. Also a strong emphasis should be placed on investigating the influence of the values present in society over the organizational climate – creating the possibility for any reform effort to address Romanian realities.

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