

IS TRAINING A PRECONDITION FOR ENHANCING INNOVATION CAPACITY? CURRENT PERCEPTION OF EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES' CIVIL SERVANTS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

The civil servants' training process plays a key role in developing the public employees' skills and broadening their vision. The present paper seeks to examine the perception of Employment Agencies' civil servants regarding the effectiveness of training programs, measured through their impact on the number of projects initiated and implemented under Sectorial Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013. The role of training programs in enhancing civil servants' innovation capacity is also investigated.

The methodology consists in an analysis of 253 projects financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) during 2009-2015 and an empirical research using a representative sample of 337 civil servants who attended EU funded training courses in project management. The conclusions of this paper indicated a direct relation between the number of projects developing training courses in 'project management' and the number of projects initiated and implemented annually by the territorial Agencies for Employment. Moreover, a positive correlation between the training programs and the innovation capacity of civil servants from County Agencies for Employment was also identified.

Keywords: professional training, innovation capacity, effectiveness of training.

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1. Context

It is well-known that civil servants' competencies are crucial to any public administration. The quality of professional training directly influences the activity and services delivered by public administration. That is why the impact of training on public administration's performance and its contribution to organizational results and climate was a subject of great concern for many scholars.

There is a legal framework that imposes the obligation of professional training for civil servants in Romania; since Romania is an EU member state, an increasing need to update civil servants' knowledge and skills has occurred, and so has a new opportunity to finance training programs by accessing European Funds. For example, the Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOPHRD) 2007-2013 (called POSDRU in Romania), fourth priority axis Modernization of Public Employment Service (PES), 4.2 major intervention area 'SPO's own personnel training', offers such a possibility to train the personnel of PES. The National Agency for Employment (NAE), as well as its territorial branches, also took advantage of this opportunity using the European Funds in different projects for civil servants' training.

The present paper attempts to analyze the relation between project management training programs and projects' development and implementation, on the one hand, and the contribution of training in enhancing civil servants' innovation capacity in the territorial Agencies for Employment, on the other hand. As an essential way to stimulate innovation activities, training ensures the exposure of civil servants to a diversity of knowledge, stimulating creativity and modern ideas. Moreover, the paper makes theoretical and empirical contributions by analyzing the concepts of training and innovation in the public sector and providing conclusive evidence regarding training's impact on project management. This article may be of interest to researchers and managers involved in the planning and evaluation of civil servants' training. Furthermore, the conclusions of this study could attract the interest of those who deliver training programs to public institutions under Human Capital Operational Program (HCOP) 2014-2020.

2. Literature review

Looking through the relevant literature, there are several definitions for the concept of training. Many decades ago, Flippo (1971) considered 'training' as 'an act of increasing the knowledge and skill of an employee for doing a particular job'. In the same spirit, other authors (Punia and Kant, 2013) who made significant contributions to measuring training effectiveness models, describe this concept as a way to stimulate the employees' and organization's development.

Generally, the concept of training represents the sum of means of information, learning, guidance, instruction, improvement of a person's knowledge and skills in a specific activity area. The training process can take place either in public organizations or outside of work, in training centers and educational institutions.

There are several reasons for in-house training (UNECE, 2013): flexibility of training's schedule; training relevance and coherence consistent with the individual's needs; reduced travelling and accommodation costs. In this regard, an important contribution belongs to Holton, Bates and Ruona (2000) who created a learning transfer system inventory (LTSI) focusing on factors affecting the knowledge transfer in the workplace.

Furthermore, the development of a new soft approach is supported by different authors (Fielden and Pearson, 1979; Bramley, 1991; Horton, 2009); this approach measures the 'value' of training by setting its indirect, but still immense, effects such as moral aspects and contribution to the development of the group.

Performing meta-analytic investigations, Arthur *et al.* (2003) examined the relationship between the type of training and evaluation characteristics, and training effectiveness in different institutions. Moreover, they conclude that the training program's effectiveness depends on the methods used and the evaluation criteria set. Other authors (Tracey and Tews, 1995) explore the connection between training programs' effectiveness and external factors such as work environment and trainees' characteristics. In addition, Eseryel (2002, p. 95) notices the emergence of several complex factors generated by 'the dynamic and ongoing interactions of the various dimensions and attributes of organizational and training goals, trainees, training situations, and instruction technologies'.

In the same vein, Ennis (2008) mentions two categories of factors influencing training's effectiveness: (a) the internal dimension expressed by the individual characteristics and (b) the external dimension linked to external environment constraints and interpersonal relationships in the workplace; in her opinion both are equally important in the training process.

In a study carried out in the Catalonia region of Spain, Quesada-Pallares (2012) explained the civil servants' responses to survey questions. Accordingly, motivational factors, such as correlation with the workplace's activity and career advancement opportunities are extremely important in facilitating the training process.

Other authors (Lai, 2011; Kochanowski, 2011) refer to knowledge and skills as motivational factors influencing civil servants' training. Thus, knowledge and skills affect each individual's roles and responsibilities and could be directly related to job specifications (Mokhtar, 2010). Depending on the external factors, they will allow a facile adaptation to transformations (Stănică, 2012), both internally and externally. Furthermore, training effectiveness depends on the subsequent workplace application of knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired by trainees (Baldwin and Ford, 1988). On the other hand, Hanum (2009) focuses on the relationship between training and performance as well as training content by looking at the myths about them.

Considering that training allows assimilating knowledge from outside the organization, different authors (Neirotti and Paolucci, 2013; Børing, 2017) have identified a clear link between the concepts of training and innovation, emphasizing that the former is a key element in anticipating the latter. Furthermore, by using databases from two of China's government reports, Shang, Li and Liu (2018) have found evidence that reduc-

ing political control on the civil service's decision-making process would lead to enhancing innovation and civil servants' creative capacity in solving citizens' problems.

According to Bučková (2015) there are two approaches in the civil servants' training system in the Czech Republic: knowledge accumulation, corresponding to the theoretical side of the courses, and organizational aspects of the public institution, as well as interpersonal relationships both with the other civil servants and the public. The factors influencing knowledge acquired in training, as well as internal and external organizational aspects, are also analyzed by the author previously mentioned.

The complexity of training evaluation related to learning, transfer and organizational impact are pointed out by Vukovic *et al.* (2008). A notorious model applying the objective-based evaluation method was developed by Kirkpatrick (1998). The model is renowned for its four levels: reaction (trainees' perception regarding course effectiveness), learning (improvement of trainees' knowledge while attending courses), behaviour (change in trainees' behavior especially regarding information use) and results (courses' impact on civil servants performance and objective achievement). More recently, Kunche *et al.* (2011) have proposed a new model, called 'backwards planning'; its process phases are reversed and are part of a cyclical process.

Furthermore, the use of demographic programs and tests for measuring effectiveness should have a key position in evaluating the training efforts and in reviewing the tools needed (Gotsch and Weimer, 1994). When applicable, the evaluation should also be extended to the workplace behavior which has important consequences on the civil servants' performance.

3. Legal framework on civil servants' training in Romania

Under the provisions of Law no. 76/2002 financial resources of the unemployment insurance budget enable co-financing the EU funded projects implemented under an operational programme. This also applies to projects involving civil servants' training activities within the National Employment Agency and its territorial branches.

Law no. 188/1999 on the Statute of Civil Servants stipulates the civil servants' right and duty to continuously improve their skills and professional training. More specifically, public institutions have to include in their budgets the amounts corresponding to professional training expenses carried out either in the public authority's interest or on the employee's own initiative. The undergraduate or PhD studies do not represent training activities and could not be covered by the state or local budget. In compliance with the legislation in force, public authorities and institutions are obliged to communicate annually to the National Agency of Civil Servants the civil servants' professional training plan. This institution is also informed about the funds foreseen in the budget to cover the corresponding training expenditures.

The normative act aimed at regulating civil servants' professional training in Romania is Government Decision no. 1066/2008 on the approval of rules on civil servants' training. The ways to achieve civil servants' professional training are listed in its content: training programs carried out by vocational training providers, completed

with participation certificates or graduation diploma; training programs developed or approved by public authorities and institutions; training programs carried out during EU funded projects implementation and other forms stipulated by the law.

During the implementation of EU funded projects, training programs aiming to receive training or qualification certificates may be carried out. The latter are issued by the organizer and are a proof of participation in the training program. However, according to the above-mentioned Government Decision, the annual evaluation process of individuals' performance requires the identification of fields where training is needed in order to improve civil servants' professional performance.

4. Research methodology

First, this research investigates the impact of training programs, measured through EU funded projects initiated and implemented by the County Agencies for Employment in Romania. Second, the paper aims to get a deeper understanding on the role of training in enhancing civil servants' innovation capacity within these agencies. Fully consistent with the above-mentioned purpose, presumptions based on observed facts have been transposed in the following hypothesis which could be proved or disproved in the validation process: the participation of civil servants from territorial Agencies for Employment in training courses on 'project management' enhances their innovation capacity.

The study's methodology consists in secondary data analysis on projects initiated and implemented by the County Agencies for Employment and a questionnaire-based survey. The secondary data analysis method has allowed to demonstrate the correlation between the topics of training courses and the number of projects initiated and implemented by the County Agencies for Employment. In this context, 253 EU funded projects having as beneficiaries the National Agency for Employment (NAE), its territorial branches and the National Training Center for NAE's Own Staff were analyzed. The data were provided by the Directorate for Coordination of Projects Financed by Non-Reimbursable EU Funds and Database Management within the National Agency for Employment.

The questionnaire seeks to identify the civil servants' perception regarding their participation in training courses carried out by EU funded projects. It was designed to obtain the data required for testing the research hypothesis of this paper. The questionnaire includes 14 questions: 7 demographic questions and 7 content questions (5 closed-ended questions and 2 open-ended questions). The latter category of questions helps in demonstrating the research hypothesis. Moreover, three questions have 5-point Likert Scale. The questionnaire has been administered during April 4-April 27, 2017 and the respondents had the choice to fill out either the paper-based or the electronic version of the questionnaire. However, all of them have preferred the electronic version. A database has been created via Google Drive program containing the systematized answers within the questionnaire. The units of analysis in this article were the civil servants within the County Agencies for Employment who attended EU funded training courses. The questionnaire administration was supported by the

head of National Agency for Employment and the Directorate for Coordination of Projects Financed by Non-Reimbursable EU Funds and Database Management within this institution.

The Final Implementation Report of SOPHRD (POSDRU) has been also analyzed in order to identify the total population of civil servants (2,146) attending EU funded training courses during the 2009-2015 period. The representative sample consisted of 326 civil servants. However, the research embraced a total of 337 civil servants selected randomly from the Final Implementation Report of SOPHRD (POSDRU). All their responses were 92.3% complete because not all respondents provided answers to the last question.

5. Results and discussions

5.1. Analysis of training projects financed by the EU under SOPHRD (POSDRU)

As presented above, the first line of inquiry is to analyze the impact of training courses on 'project management' on the number of projects initiated and implemented by the County Agencies for Employment during the 2009-2015 period. The analysis is carried out for the projects financed under the Sectorial Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013, Priority Axis 4, which supported 1,628 employment agencies. More than 13,000 civil servants within these agencies were trained.

However, the number of the officially declared trained personnel is much higher than the real number of trained personnel within the agencies due to civil servants' participation at several training courses. Thus, 2,146 out of a total of 13,093 participants in training courses are unique participants, leading to an average of 6 courses per civil servant.

Table 1 provides selected statistics relating to EU funded training projects for civil servants within the territorial Agencies for Employment. It shows a poor situation of EU funds' absorption for 2009, with only 3 agencies out of a total of 70 (only 4%) being supported to implement training programs. The situation has improved in 2010 because 52 territorial Agencies for Employment out of 95 (meaning 54%) received support. Moreover, the year 2011 has shown a positive trend and the proposed target is not only fulfilled, but also exceeded (166 agencies received support while the target was 125). In 2012, 96% of the proposed target was achieved (155 agencies out of 160 received support) while in 2013 the target achievement has dropped to 77% (140 agencies out of 180 received support). In 2014, no more than 131 agencies out of 190 proposed (meaning 68%) got support.

Furthermore, 253 EU financed projects initiated and implemented during 2009-2015 have also been analyzed. The annual breakdown of these projects was as follows: 1 project was implemented in 2009, 8 projects in 2010, 13 projects in 2011, 51 projects in 2012, 52 projects in 2013, 19 projects in 2014, 109 projects in 2015. Only 22 projects out of the 253 mentioned above were intended for civil servants' training within County

Table 1: Statistics on civil servants' training carried out under SOPHRD (POSDRU in Romanian), Priority Axis 4, Major Intervention Area 4.2 within territorial Agencies for Employment

Indicators		2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Number of supported employment agencies	Accomplished	0	0	3	55	224	379	519	650	1,628	1,628 ¹
	Target	-	50	70	95	125	160	180	190	200	200 (cumulative 1,270*)
Number of trained personnel	Accomplished	0	0	205	345	2,916	3,578	4,876	6,017	13,093	13,093 ²
	Target	-	1,250	1,565	1,900	2,245	2,575	2,800	2,950	3,000	3,000 (cumulative 1,8285*)

1 Cumulative value. The unique number of supported employment agencies is 289.

2 Cumulative value. It represents the personnel of SPO (Public Employment Service – SPO in Romanian) trained during (SOPHRD) programme implementation (until December 31, 2015). Some individuals are no longer employed because of successive restructurings during 2008-2015; in addition, each employee attended several training programs in their field of activity. The 2007 base consisting of 1,048 people was not added to this value.

Source: Romanian Government, 2017

Agencies for Employment. Moreover, 8 projects out of the 22 previously mentioned developed training courses in ‘project management’ (see Table 2). The 22 projects were financed under the Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOPHRD-POSDRU) 2007-2013, Priority Axis 4 Modernization of Employment Public Office (EPO), Major Intervention Area 4.2 ‘Training of EPO staff’. This programme has aimed at strengthening the skills of NAE personnel, acquiring new skills, promoting new facilities and working methods, planning, developing and implementing EU funded projects with non-reimbursable funding, programming continuous training activities and developing operational procedures applicable to the EPO.

The analysis of data revealed that the impact of the project ‘Increasing the Employment Public Office’s capacity in the region to plan projects’ on the number of projects initiated and implemented during 2009-2010 was reduced (from 1 project implemented in 2009 to 8 projects implemented in 2010). There was also a slight improvement regarding the project ‘MRB Performant System’ initiated and implemented by Dolj County Agency for Employment. The number of projects increased from 8 in 2010 to 13 in 2011.

A significant improvement has occurred during 2011-2013 when the project ‘Training for the development of Employment Public Office’ staff’ was implemented (the total number of projects initiated and implemented by the County Agencies for Employment was 116, as follows: 13 in 2011, 51 in 2012, 52 in 2013). The impact of projects developing training courses in ‘project management’ implemented during 2014-2015 was major, the number of projects initiated and implemented by the County Agencies increased to 128 during the above-mentioned period (see Table 2).

The collected data showed a correlation between the number of projects developing training courses in ‘project management’ and the number of projects initiated and implemented annually by the County Agencies for Employment.

Table 2: Financial statement¹ of EU funded projects where the National Agency for Employment (NAE) or its territorial branches were partners

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Period	Total no. of projects initiated and implemented under SOPHRD with the beneficiary NAE/CAE/NTCNOS	Value of projects under point 1	Total value of projects initiated and implemented under SOPHRD with the beneficiary NAE/CAE/NTCNOS	Total value of projects initiated and implemented under SOPHRD with the beneficiary NAE/CAE/NTCNOS excepting projects under point 1	Income received by NAE/CAE/NTCNOS due to the initiation and implementation of projects under point 2 excepting projects under point 1 (only includes ENF)	Share of projects value under point 1 in the total value of projects
2009-2010	9	17,474,376.00	563,712,384.00	546,238,008.00	440,176,345.67	3.10%
2011-2012	64	17,858,720.00	569,435,359.75	551,576,639.75	386,371,602.83	3.14%
2013-2014	71	39,981,972.00	743,510,231.00	703,528,259.00	611,715,486.00	5.38%
2015	109*	0.00	128,476,485.00	128,476,485.00	72,676,697.00	0.00%
TOTAL	253	75,315,068.00	2,005,134,459.75	1,929,819,391.75	1,510,940,131.50	3.76%

Legend: SOPHRD – Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013 (called POSDRU in Romania), NAE – National Agency for Employment; CAE – County Agency for Employment; NTCNOS – National Training Center for NAE's Own Staff; ENF – European non-reimbursable funds.

Source: National Agency for Employment, 2017

1 Information has been provided only for 20 projects out of 109.

The above correlation should be examined in relation to the projects' requirements and the civil servants' training needs. In order to be successful, civil servants involved in EU funded projects' development and implementation should possess a range of skills such as: advanced project management, leadership, communication, scheduling, negotiation, cost management, critical thinking, task management and teamwork. According to Rammata (2017), these skills can be gleaned from experience or training courses. Civil servants' participation in training courses on project management addresses a variety of their needs related to successful initiation and implementation of projects (Žurga, 2018). While the employees' training needs in carrying out projects are met, the territorial Agencies will experience increases in their initiation and implementation. Moreover, the investments in civil servants' training contribute to a learning atmosphere, generate a continuous climate of gaining knowledge and skills. This allows exchanging information and opinions between participants, which subsequently has the effect of producing new knowledge, skills and ideas.

Financially, the total value of the 22 projects for civil servants' training within County Agencies was 253,204,250 lei (54,452,527 Euros). This represents 12.63% of the total value of projects initiated and implemented by these agencies during the 2009-2015 period (Table 2). The value share of the 8 projects developing training courses in 'project management' in the total value of projects initiated and implemented by the National Agency for Employment and its territorial branches in the Programming Period 2007-2013 was 3.76%.

The revenues attracted by the National Agency for Employment from European non-reimbursable funds amounted to 1,510,940,131 lei (324,933,361 Euros), while the co-financing was of 438,260,207 lei (94,249,506 Euros). The financial distribution was similar during 2009-2010 and 2011-2012, consisting of 17 million lei (3,655,914 Euros) for each period (the value of projects developing training courses in 'project management'), with a similar overall benefit of about 560 million lei. Regarding 2013-2014, compared to the previous period (2011-2012), there was a significant increase (about 30%) in the financial allocation for projects developing training courses in 'project management' (from 569,435,359 to 743,510,231 lei, or 122,459,216 Euros to 159,894,673 Euros).

5.2. Analysis of civil servants' perception regarding training programs

The second area of inquiry is to examine the relation between the participation of civil servants within County Agencies for Employment in training programs and their innovation capacity; in this regard, the answers to the questionnaire were analyzed and the research hypothesis was tested.

The demographic descriptors of the respondents are the following: 75.07% are female (253 respondents) vs. 24.93% male (84 respondents); more than one-third of respondents (37.09% – 125 persons) have a specialization in economics, 19.88% (67 respondents) in administrative sciences, 13.95% (47 respondents) in legal sciences and 29.08% (98 respondents) have a different specialization. The majority of respondents (52.82%

– 178 persons) are aged over 45, while 42.14% (142 respondents) are aged 33-45 and the remaining 5.04% (17 respondents) are aged 23-32. None of the respondents are aged 18-22 years old; therefore, the age-structure proportions are not fully representative.

Moreover, the majority of respondents (87.24% – 294 persons) are highly experienced in the public administration field, holding the highest professional grade (superior, as maximum level – minimum 9 years seniority or experience), while 8.01% (27 respondents) hold the professional grade principal (as second level – minimum 5 years seniority or experience). The civil servants with the professional grade assistant (as third level – minimum 1 year seniority) accounted for 4.75% of the respondents (16 persons). The questionnaire was applied to civil servants who attended training courses. That is why, none of them is a beginner, all of them holding at least the professional grade assistant which indicates a professional experience of at least 1 year.

Furthermore, most civil servants have several years of experience in working in public administration: 82.2% (277 respondents) served over 10 years; 9.2% (31 respondents) served the public interest between 5-10 years; 3.56% (12 respondents) worked in public institutions between 3 and 5 years; from the total number of respondents, 5.04% (17 persons) served less than 3 years in public administration. Most respondents have a high seniority on their post: 70.32% (237 respondents) over 10 years seniority; 13.06% (44 respondents) between 5-10 years seniority; 6.82% (23 respondents) between 3-5 years seniority. 9.8% of the total number of respondents (33 persons) have less than 3 years of seniority on their post.

Finally, the majority of those surveyed hold the position of inspector (44.21% – 149 persons) and counsellor (30.86% – 104 respondents), while the others occupy the position of legal counsellor (3.56% – 12 persons), referent (2.09% – 7 persons), specialty referent (1.18% – 4 persons). The remaining 10.98% (37 persons) fill the position of chief of service (15 respondents), public auditor (9 respondents), deputy executive director (5 respondents), executive director (5 respondents), deputy director (1 respondents), chief of department (1 respondent) and public manager (1 respondent).

Another item of interest to this study was the civil servants' participation in training courses depending on their topic (question no. 8). Consequently, 73% of the civil servants (246 respondents) attended training courses in project management while the remaining 27% (91 respondents) attended training courses on other topics.

An analysis on the respondents' perception about workplace application of knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired during training courses was also made. The corresponding closed-ended question (no. 9) within the questionnaire used a Likert Scale containing five positions with five category values. The 337 respondents expressed their option by marking one of these positions. The answers are positive, indicating a favorable reaction: 74% of the civil servants surveyed (250 respondents) would apply knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired from training courses to a large and very large extent and only 8% (27 respondents) to a small and very small extent. The distribution of each feature in the proportions obtained is shown in Figure 1.

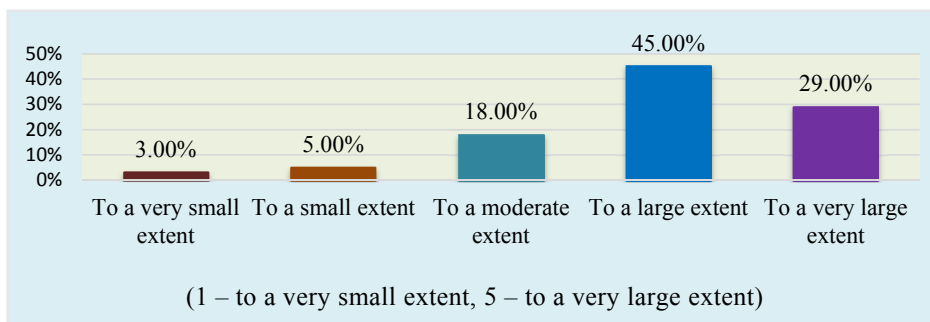


Figure 1: Workplace application of knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired during the training courses

Source: The authors

The responses to this question support the theoretical considerations of Baldwin and Ford (1988) previously mentioned in the literature review section. Moreover, knowledge, skills and attitudes are necessary for responding to present and future needs in the sphere of social-economic development as well as for increasing effectiveness in performing work tasks and delivering public services (De Oliveira, 2018). According to survey respondents, training courses had a great contribution in acquiring these knowledge, skills and attitudes, while their workplace application outlines the high quality of training programs.

The following statement (question no. 10) was aimed to identify the importance given by respondents to the aspects that increase training programs' effectiveness. Based on the distribution of data presented in Table 3, the most important factor has got a score of 4.47. Therefore, a better correlation between job task and training topic is the main factor for increasing training effectiveness. In this regard, the training program should aim to improve civil servants' knowledge and skills in order to better perform their tasks at the current job.

Table 3: The score of factors for increasing training effectiveness

No.	Factors	Mean
	Correlation between job task and training topic	4.47
	Type of training provider (national or international)	3.79
	Total number of hours within the training program	3.93
	Place where training program is carried out (in the country or abroad)	3.45

Source: The authors

Question no. 11 examined to what extent professional training carried out within EU funded projects has positively influenced the aspects indicated in Table 4. As shown in Table 4, there appeared to be a high level of preference for working group cohesion (mean 3.96); thus, professional training has the greatest influence on the working group cohesion. A possible explanation for this result is that it could contribute not only to the team cohesion within the same agency, but also between territorial

agencies as well. The National Agency for Employment has an important territorial network (over 200 agencies/work points) and interaction with civil servants within territorial branches is most often done by telephones and e-mail. In this context, training courses provided the opportunity for direct contact between civil servants from different territorial Agencies, each of them developing public speaking skills, stress management and effective communication skills. Moreover, they worked together in solving the issues and in facing the challenges proposed by the training provider.

Table 4: The score of the items positively influenced by professional training

No.	Items	Mean
1	Working group cohesion	3.96
2	Workplace effectiveness	3.80
3	Innovation capacity	3.75
4	Best practices transfer from other countries	3.93

Source: The authors

Acquiring knowledge and skills implicitly leads to effectiveness of working groups (Mura and Vlacseková, 2018), increase of performance (Nunes, Martins and Mozzicaffreddo, 2018; Ciobanu and Androniceanu, 2018; Beiu and Davidescu, 2018), easier acceptance of hierarchical relationships, better integration within a group, etc. Additionally, civil servants' participation in training sessions has considerably improved both the relationship between PES – headquarters and territorial agencies for employment, and relationships among PES employees, as well as between civil servants and citizens. Furthermore, their participation in 30-day personalized communication sessions, consisting in describing and analyzing specific situations, as well as team-building, coaching and mentoring activities, also contributed to the effectiveness of the communication process.

As regards innovation capacity, although the score obtained is 3.75 (see Table 4), it is above average. Therefore, the respondents are fully aware of the importance of innovation in the public sector and the role of training in its emergence.

When analyzing the weaknesses of EU funded training courses (question no. 12), 24% of the respondents (80 persons) mentioned the lack of correlation between the positions held by the civil servants and the type of training course. Other issues identified were related to:

- disproportionality between the practical and theoretical side of the courses; hence, 15% of the respondents (50 persons) were dissatisfied with the small number of hours allocated to the practical side of each course;
- duration of training courses – 11% of the respondents (37 persons) mentioned they were too short;
- lack of certification for skills acquired in training;
- issuance of graduation certificates for certain courses (according to Government Ordinance no. 129/2000 on adults' vocational training);

- limited access to training resources as well as dissatisfaction with trainers' competence, which in some cases was below expectations.

As noted above, there are significant weaknesses of training courses underlined by the respondents. While dissatisfaction is understandable given the various training courses and the large number of attendees, training providers should focus on fulfilling these gaps in order to maximize civil servants' potential.

Figure 2 presents the respondents' opinion about the number of training courses to be attended by a civil servant per year (question no. 13). 29% (98 respondents) out of the 337 persons surveyed declared that civil servants should attend a training course per year, while the other 71% had a different opinion: 35.4% (119 respondents) ticked the option twice a year, 24.3% (82 respondents) three times a year, and 11.3% (38 respondents) more than three times a year. The training courses provide more expertise to the civil servants as well as greater analysis in their field of activity. Therefore, the respondents are aware that well-trained civil servants are able to properly respond to challenges, thereby helping the public authorities and institutions to be stable and sustainable in the modern world.

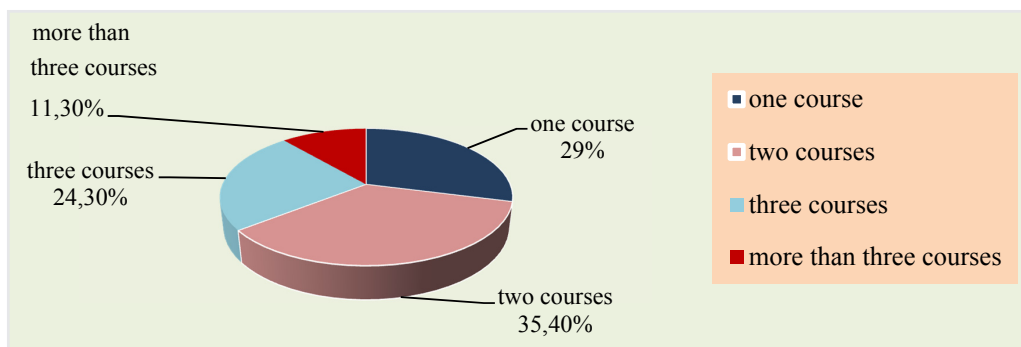


Figure 2: The number of training courses to be attended by a civil servant per year

Source: The authors

The last question (no. 14) referred to the respondents' opinion regarding the factors affecting professional training effectiveness (in addition to those previously mentioned in the questionnaire). Not all civil servants surveyed answered this open-ended question. Moreover, there are significant differences in their responses. 17.5% of the respondents (59 persons) mentioned that the practical side of the training courses should be more extensive, transforming them into practice-based courses. 10.97% of the respondents (37 persons) focused on the exchange of good practice both at national level, between county agencies and at international level, with other EU member states. The courses for improving English knowledge were considered an important factor by 21 respondents (6.23%). Remarks regarding online courses, communication courses and organization of courses per region were also made. Hence, the respondents are aware of technological, normative and procedural evolutions within the Ro-

manian society. This requires important changes in their activity, especially as regards information and communication technology, cooperation with foreign institutions, management professionalization, etc.

The research hypothesis of this study was validated by the data collected through the questionnaire. This predicted that ‘the participation of civil servants from territorial Agencies for Employment in training courses on project management enhances their innovation capacity’. In order to test it, the distribution of answers to questions no. 8 and 11 was analysed. Accordingly, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) and the null hypothesis (H_0) were identified:

- H_0 : There is no relation between the participation of civil servants from territorial Agencies for Employment in training courses on ‘project management’ and their innovation capacity; and
- H_a : There is a relation between the participation of civil servants from territorial Agencies for Employment in training courses on ‘project management’ and their innovation capacity.

The Chi square test was used to validate the hypothesis. The test showed the following results: $\chi^2 = 75.177$, $p = 0.000$, $p < 0.05$, thus the H_0 is rejected and we can affirm that there is a relation between the participation of civil servants from County Agencies for Employment in training courses on ‘project management’ and their innovation capacity. The χ^2 test shows only if there is a statistical relationship between two variables, but it does not evaluate the relative strength of it. In order to measure the correlation strength, the Goodman and Kruskal tau measure of association was used. If τ equals zero there is no association between variables, if it equals 1 there is a perfect association. As regards the Goodman and Kruskal tau measure of association, $\tau = 0.72$, thus the hypothesis is confirmed.

By improving employees’ knowledge, skills, attitude, and social behavior for increasing the organization’s performance, training could be considered a necessary prerequisite to innovation in public administration. While training provides civil servants with the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills for developing new projects, it also could help them find better solutions to the society’s problems and to understand the dimensions of administrative responsibilities as well as the dynamics of administrative phenomena. Moreover, the current challenges of the public sector determine it to identify solutions that get beyond incremental enhancements. The public administration should admit that identifying solutions or simply developing the existing ones is not always sufficient. It should set the conditions for innovation and provide an environment for new ideas, focusing on rethinking its processes and structures; in these circumstances, innovation and training approaches should be merged.

6. Limitations and suggestions for future research

While this research aims at evaluating the relation between project management training programs and projects initiated and implemented by civil servants, on the one hand, and the role of training programs in enhancing innovation capacity in the

County Agencies for Employment in Romania, on the other hand, it has some limitations.

The theoretical investigation from the beginning was focused on the concept of training by outlining the main factors influencing it, as well as on the role of innovation in the public sector. However, other researchers might argue or identify a different, potentially more compelling, perspective on this subject.

Moreover, the sample used represents only the civil servants from the territorial Agencies for Employment who attended EU financed training courses. Hence, the findings should not be generalized to all Romanian civil servants. As regards the completion of the questionnaire, the direct support from the head of National Agency for Employment as well as from Directorate for Coordination of Projects Financed by Non-Reimbursable EU Funds and Database Management might vitiate responses received because the civil servants could have perceived this request as official.

Another limitation of this study refers to the absence of interviews. A more complete analysis would require additional data from interviews with civil servants who were project managers. This would help to determine the ways to increase the effectiveness of training programs carried out by EU funded projects.

The public documents analyzed in this article are formally drawn up at the end of a 7-year financial programming period. Therefore, this paper can serve to lay the groundwork for further research focusing on POCU (Romanian Operational Programme Human Capital) programming 2014-2020, research that can begin in 2023 (as there is a possibility to get funding from the POCU until 31.12.2023). Clearly, expanding research to all public administration agencies/institutions will make more data available. This means that future similar analyses could provide more accurate results while the present study might encourage further sophisticated research.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

The main objective of this paper was to study the impact of training programs within territorial Agencies for Employment on the civil servants' capacity to initiate and implement EU funded projects. The role of training in enhancing civil servants' innovation capacity was also investigated. The reason for choosing this topic lies in the crucial role played by training in acquiring knowledge and adapting civil servants to changes. It allows public administration employees to expand their creativity and enhance problem-solving skills as well as be open to new ideas that may later represent a source of organizational innovation.

An analysis of projects developed by the territorial Agencies for Employment was made by studying the official reports in the field. The results suggested a positive correlation between the topic of courses and the number of projects initiated and implemented by these institutions.

Another relevant finding of the study referred to the efficiency of professional training programs in 'project management' during the Programming period 2007-2013. Thus, the revenues of the National Agency for Employment obtained by Euro-

pean non-reimbursable funds amounted to 1,510,940,131 lei (324,933,361 Euros), while the national financing was of 438,260,207 lei (94,249,506 Euros).

This study also used a questionnaire-based survey which gathered the opinion of 337 civil servants from territorial Agencies for Employment who attended EU funded training courses. In this regard, a research hypothesis on the contribution of training in enhancing civil servants' innovation capacity has been proposed. The results of the statistical processing pointed out that the research hypothesis was validated.

Considering the findings of the empirical research, some interesting and potentially important recommendations have been detailed below. The civil servants participating in the research expressed dissatisfaction with the number of hours allocated to the practical side of training courses compared to the theoretical one. In this regard, the selection procedure for vocational training providers should include conditions about the structure of training courses. Moreover, these conditions should be set by analyzing the need for civil servants' training (type of courses, number of hours allocated to the practical side, number of hours allocated to the theoretical side).

Furthermore, vocational training providers with whom the National Employment Agency and its territorial branches cooperate should provide training courses accredited by the National Authority for Qualifications (NAQ). The civil servants surveyed drew a special attention to this problem (question 12) and declared that certain training certificates were not recognized in Romania and were not accredited by NAQ. Therefore, the selection procedure for civil servants' training providers should include the attestation/certification requirements by NAQ in order to avoid the situations previously mentioned.

In order to increase the quality of EU funded training courses, it would be appropriate to differentiate the wages of civil servants responsible for writing project proposals. The payment should be proportional to the results of projects evaluated (through analysis and surveys conducted among civil servants attending the training courses).

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