

The Professionalization of Public Administration in Romania

Mihaela CĂRĂUȘAN¹

Abstract: The general configuration of the state and its responsibilities has changed and this has introduced important modifications both in the policy arena and in the State's requirements for high-level skills, qualitatively and quantitatively. Even if Romanian public administration is mainly seen as bureaucratic, oversized and unable to attract the best trained civil servants, the issue of the professionalization of its human resources has never been brought to the fore. Moreover, public functions are not included in the category of the most desired ones the vast majority of people try to obtain such a job, considering that it provides stability. Turnaround professional qualification indicates the rate of experience, knowledge, and integrity necessary to conduct renewal work. Unfortunately, formal barriers hindering the promotion (e.g. waiting time, professional seniority) and limited development opportunities (flat management structures, lack of visible career paths, inadequate information on vacancies) have a negative impact on the degree of motivation and commitment at work, and of course they adversely affect service quality. In this regard we undertake a study among students and graduates of schools of public administration in Romania, Bucharest, from which we determine the worst and the best 10 jobs you can get today in public administration. Moreover, we will seek to find out which is their motivation to have an education in administrative sciences. Also, we focus our attention on those employed in public institutions to pursue their professional route and their professional qualification. Once established, we will endeavour to create the axis of professional career in public administration. This research will hold a discussion on professional qualification, articulated with the unemployment caused by the present crisis. It will aim to demonstrate the consolidation of the professional (dis)qualification as a tool. We will see that professional qualification in public administration involves several factors which are interconnected in one and the same process, such as politics, motivation and quality of life.

Keywords: human resources, motivation, professional qualification, career axis.

1. Is the Professional Career in Public Administration a Challenge?

The nation-state has to deal with the situation and they call public administration for this. The strength of the administrative capacity consists of the qualification of human resources. Administration should play a unique and important role: to be a stability factor.

¹ Senior Lecturer, PhD, National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania. 6 Povernei Street, Sector 1, Bucharest, Romania, tel.: +4021.318.08.97, fax: +4021.312.25.35. Corresponding author: mihaelacarusan@gmail.com.

Although the majority of population opposes to the interference of political actors in administration and thinks that administration should serve all the citizens, in reality, it is not always so. Legal and practical framework for career development policies belong to either a merit system or a spoil system. Even the public administration reformers fight for career system, politicians try to impose the spoil system and by doing this its lack of qualification.

According to Rosebloom and Kravchuk (p. 38) public administrators are called upon to be managers, policy makers, and constitutional lawyers. Public administrators are called on to help solve the nation's problems and improve its quality of life. However, there is little consensus on how they should proceed. Although their jobs are sometimes impossible, public administration can be rewarding.

The modern professions are complex, social institutions which select people of varied skills, often from several social strata, and organise them into different levels of operation and diverse interest groups. Each level and groups may be sensitive to contingencies not shared by the profession as a whole. (Smith, p. 410) Our complex modern public administration has multiple relations and the problems occurring in different areas of sensitivity of the professions are highlighted during periods of professional change. Professionals have the special privilege of freedom from control from outsiders. Their privilege is justified by three claims. First, their work entails such a high degree of skill and knowledge that only fellow professionals can make accurate assessments of professional performance. Second, a high degree of selflessness and responsibilities characteristic to professionals, so they can be trusted at work implicitly. Third, in those rare instances in which individual professionals do not perform with sufficient skill or conscientiousness, their colleagues may be trusted to undertake the proper regulatory action. These claims support the professional's attempt to avoid submission to conventional bureaucratic control within the institution. (Freidson & Rhea, pp. 107-108) Professionalism, rather than the existence of specialisation, may be considered the chief barrier to the performance of public administration.

In every established occupation, shared values and expectations are developed around the meaning of the occupation and its place in the world. This occupational culture may be threatened or torn apart during periods of drastic professional change. Conflicting alternative conceptions may arise. Then, when common front is most required of professions, when it faces opposition or misunderstanding, it may be least able to muster unity. (Smith, p. 412) The situation given happens in Romania as well, one branch of public administration – central administration has the whole attention and leave local administration without any. There is a gap in the profession pyramid, everybody wants to work at the central level because there the job is much better paid and the responsibility is very low. The structural complexity of the modern profession entails other important problems:

communication and relations within the profession may become more difficult to maintain; and the occupation may find it harder to establish its place clearly in the rank order of occupations and professions (Smith, p. 412). Such problems take many forms, for instance technocrats to the outside observer are incompatible with politicians.

From a historical perspective, we can say that the relationship between political power and administration has evolved in a manner favourable to the latter to the point that, a country like Sweden could deny the value of the subordination principle to the Government Administration. We must mention that the administration does not deny any subordination to the law. Conversely, the fact that officials are irremovable as judges, and that their duties are realized in conditions of perfect independence, did not give them the possibility to escape from responsibility. They are checked by the judicial authorities, and also by the institution of Ombudsman. The spoil system after all has been a generally valid one (until the establishment of the Merit System, 1883), but it is no longer used in the U.S. with the exception of certain political positions. The truth is that now, the idea of unconditional obedience of the administration to the political power continues. The concept has strong roots in the belief according to which the personnel from the administrative apparatus must be engaged politically to the government, to serve it faithfully and effectively (Rosembloom & Kravchuk, pp. 204-211). An exception would be UK which adopted the principle of political neutrality of those appointed as 'civil servants'. As in Ireland, they must choose between a career in administration or politics. (Ziller)

The professionalizing occupation, such as civil servants, may be involved in competition with politicians, and this may lead to organizational strain within public administration. Members of a profession should take into account that spearheading moves most of the time, interfere within their own profession.

For many members the present set of operations may be exactly what they want or, if not quite that, exactly what were trained for. They may feel comfortable having achieved success or recognition on the basis of their present skills. Drastic changes in the system may invite new competition or require new courses of education and training. Any organized profession includes resistance to change within its very principles of organization: it possesses institutional inertia (Smith, pp. 411-412). Changes like those which interfere in transition countries in times of crises can makes professionals to abandon their career for something more simplistic. Unfortunately that is the situation in Romania, none of the professionals wants to assume the responsibility of conducting the state administration. Public administration is unable to attract the best trained civil servants.

In our research¹ we have noticed that a professional career is identified as the main motivating element to the accession in a public functions. For 65% of the people, the professional career ranks higher than the 'sure of tomorrow' feeling and the salary.

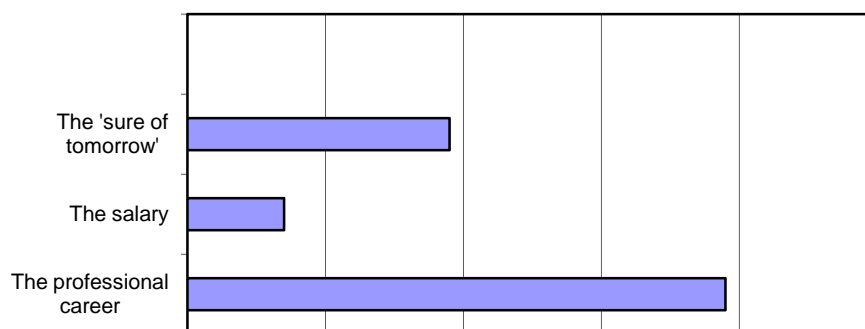


Figure 1. The motivational elements for accessing a public function

Even so, there is a majority that admits that the professional career is a path to access a public function, most of the respondents, more precisely 47%, consider that they are not exactly attracted (moderate) to occupy such a job. Only 16% consider broadly that they feel attracted to become a civil servant. What is surprising is the fact that even if they are students or graduates of public administration studies, they do not intend to have a career in civil services (11%).

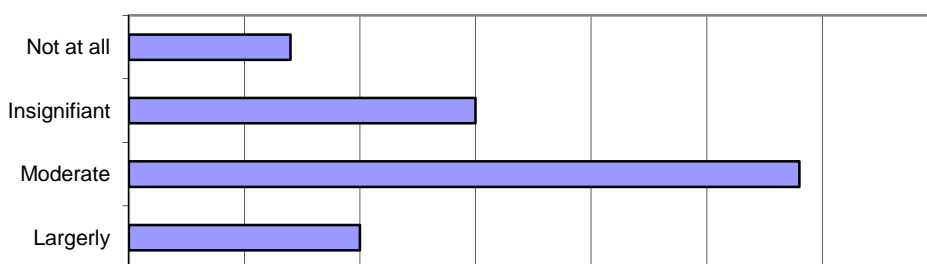


Figure 2. How much you want to have a public function?

¹ The data upon which this paper is based are collected from 100 respondents – students and graduates of Schools of Public Administration in Romania, Bucharest.

2. Romanian Professional Career System for Civil Servants

Human resources development aims to increase the professional capacity of employees to continue their growth and advancement in the system and to develop, to enhance their ability as a successful employee in compliance with their duties and greater responsibilities. The ultimate objective of human resources management reform is not only to increase the quality and performance but also to increase efficiency, productivity, to save resources and to serve public interests.

There is a close correlation between the economic situation, employment labour and political decisions to increase or decrease employment labour in the public sector, public sector employment conditions and recruitment policies. These factors and developments will determine the attractiveness of employment in the public sector.

Changes in HRM in the public sector must be supported by the public administration reform, namely by the creation of a career system designed to attract in terms of pay and by providing guarantees in terms of planning and building a career. These two reforming actions can acquire reputation for public administration and the existence of a real professional mobility. For example, to give a possible solution to improve the quality of public services, the employee should be recruited from the first 10% of graduates each year, but should also provide opportunities to build attractive careers.

HR functions (including training needs assessment) are underestimated in government institutions. Human resource function (except for higher institutions) is usually a function that complements other functions within the existing government hierarchy. The role within the institution is limited to the minimum legal requirements.

CENTRAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ²	TERRITORIAL SERVICES OF THE CENTRAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ³	LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ⁴
The General Secretary of the Government (& the deputy)	The Prefect (& the deputy)	
The General Secretary of the ministry (& the deputy)		
Governmental inspectors		
General directors (& their deputies)		Chief secretary of the local community
Directors (& their deputies)	Executive directors (& their deputies)	Executive directors (& their deputies)
Head of unit	Head of unit	Head of unit
Head of office	Head of office	Head of office
Executive functions	Executive functions	Executive functions
▪ Superior	▪ Superior	▪ Superior
▪ Principal	▪ Principal	▪ Principal
▪ Assistant	▪ Assistant	▪ Assistant
▪ Junior	▪ Junior	▪ Junior

Figure 3. The Romanian’s civil servant system

Performance evaluation results are not included in the assessment of departmental needs and in the institutional needs assessment. Thus, evaluation only serves individual development and even in this case - the development plans does not reflect the need for long-term career planning, but for a short term career planning.

Performance evaluations are aimed at assessing ‘the best’ and punish ‘those who do not listen’. The criteria used to determine what is ‘good’ are already set, but they are not measurable due to lack of interconnection, whose indicators can be measured objectively. There is no evaluation based on results, so results are not monitored.

Public functions are divided into: general government functions and specific public functions, public functions of Class I, Class II and Class III; state public functions and local functions. According to the civil holder duties, public functions can be divided to the category of high officials, public management functions and executive public functions. Executive public functions are subdivided into professional degrees: superior, principal, assistant, junior.

For the daily management of human resources and public offices in each authority / public institution we can find a specialized department, which follows the career of civil servants and prepares their professional file.

Civil servants career can be divided into several stages: civil service recruitment, probation period, the appointment of civil servants, promoting civil servants and the professional performance evaluation system. Careers in civil service may develop by blind promoted to a high public office. Promotion implies a higher pay and presupposes certain principles: competence, competition, equality, professionalism, motivation, transparency. A person can hold a public office, if certain conditions are reached, conditions relating to citizenship, residence, Romanian language, age, health, education, specific conditions for public service jobs, criminal record or dismissal from public office. A public service job is achieved through: promotion, transfer, redeployment, re-sparing and other means expressly provided by the Statute.

Recruitment of civil servants is based on competition. For filling vacant public offices it is necessary to participate in the competition. Its organization is established by law. Recruitment is a process for ensuring a sufficient number of qualified candidates from which they select those that best fit to undertake the functions required within the public administration.

Competition for occupying public offices involves three steps: filling a registration file, sustaining the written test and the interview, followed by the admission. For the appointed junior civil servant the probation period varies between 12 and 6 months, depending on the public function. The junior civil servant receives a training program approved by the public authority or institution and is assisted by a tutor. Before the end of the period of probation, he/she performs a report of activity. The period of probation is meant to assess the skills, the knowledge gained in carrying out the duties and responsibilities of the public office and the practical training. After evaluation, a junior civil servant receives a grade of ‘favourable’ (circumstances involving the appointment as permanent civil servant) or a grade of

‘inadequate’ (a situation which leads to the removal from public office). Before issuing the final appointment, the civil servant must lay the oath of allegiance, its refusal leads to revocation of the administrative title.

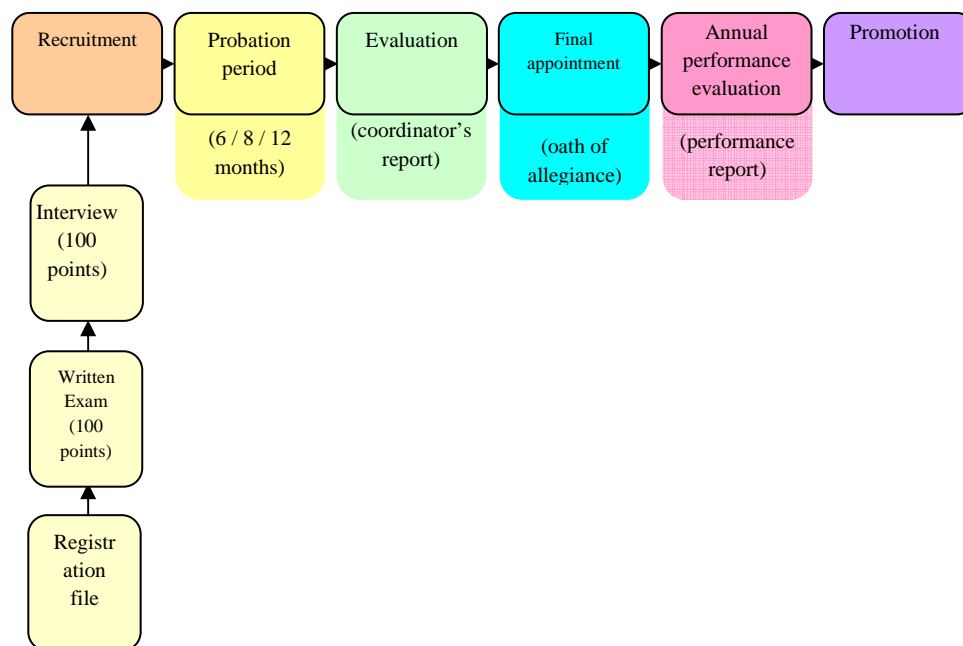


Figure 4. Romanian civil servant's career path

Promoting civil servants is a process that involves competition or examination. Promotion may be permanent (civil service dealing with competition or examination) or temporary (dealing with civil service for a specified period), and applies to civil servants who do team running and possess a higher education diploma in the specialty operating.

Individual job performance worksheet is made annually and involves the following ratings: ‘very good’, ‘good’, ‘satisfactory’ and ‘unsatisfactory’ torus. The need for the presence of experts in specialized administrative functions of the different level of government authority is unquestionable. Leaving the civil service can be made by: completion of service by resignation, the public servant notifying in writing the public authority or institution head (resignation takes effect after 30 days from registration), by mutual agreement (recorded in writing), by dismissal and by disengage/release of (also in writing).

3. The Axis of Professional Qualification in Public Administration

We begin by considering education as the avoidance of unemployment. Higher education importance has a particularly powerful effect on the access to professional and managerial occupations. In Romania almost all academic institutions have public administration as a field of study, but not all of them have students. One of the critical differences among higher educational institutions is the nature of the professional tasks performed. In general they can be classified according to the academic degree programs offered and the professional qualifications of faculty. (Baldrige et al., p. 381)

The Romanian educational system starts at the age of 4 years with the nursery school, following the primary school and the lower secondary school. The high school and the vocational school, after obtaining a baccalaureate diploma give us the possibility to follow a university system, a higher education institution, or a pre-university institution for professional qualification. The higher education diploma can be awarded after the graduation of the university – 1st cycle, bachelor diploma. The master's degree diploma lasts for 3 or 4 semesters and are performed either in the field of the bachelor diploma or in other fields of studies. The master's degree studies are completed by a dissertation, the graduate receives a master diploma. The PhD studies (minimum 3 years) are finalized by a research thesis and graduates are awarded with the PhD diploma. The universities also offer life-long training programmes according to the market demand and the needs for professional reconversion.

The education of human resources in public administration must distinguish between the necessary training for administrative functions - senior managers (who generally have a political nature), specialized administrative functions and the functions that need only medium training. Regardless of how education is made, it is known that the value of an administration, its effectiveness, depends mostly on people who compose it. But to obtain such professional competence, it is necessary that all institutions should provide education for government staff, should rather focus on one hand more on research than teaching, and, secondly, more on practice than theory.

Thus, education and training will be focused more on development and will cultivate the necessary skills rather than the automatic sending of knowledge often considered generally applicable. The literature is increasingly shaping a new approach to the problems of the civil servant, whose qualification is considered the most important criterion in the appreciation of a public manager. Training is the process that allows individuals to find solutions to their questions aroused in work situations and provoke a conscious change. (Weiss, 1999, p. 442) We must make a distinction between the concepts of 'education' and 'training' because of the almost inevitably overlap of these terms in everyday language.

The distinction is not simply a 'fad' or a mere academic matter of semantics; it is a point of interest for specialized work. Thus, Livy (1988, p. 145) determined that the training is broadly examined and is given by 'any possible deployment of activities of an educational-training, fostering creativity and improvement professional skills, regardless the place of these activities. The term 'education' has a different connotation it is more academic and establishes *why* certain things happen or should happen and the relationship between them. The term 'training' focuses on the question of *how* things happen and covers the practical essence of the changes. The main aim of training is increasing the performance action (Livy, 1988, pp. 151-152). But there are other reasons for which training is one element of the 'outpost' of human resources management: it develops human potential; it helps individuals to 'grow' both professionally and socio-culturally. For this, the Romanian public administration, according to regulations, creates few public school/institute for training. For a period of almost 9 years, we have had, a successful institution, the National Institute of Administration which trained public servants in all fields of study. In 2009 the Institute due to the financial crises became only a department within the National Agency of Public Servants. For special domains we also have specialized schools, e.g. The School of Public Finance and Customs created under the Ministry of Public Finance.

The creation of training organization submitted to public administration supports the development of its key source – its employees. To train means to invest in people, to enable them, to operate more efficiently and to support them so that they may be free to use their best native skills (Weiss, 1999, pp. 429-430).

It is obvious that only achieving theoretical standards is no longer sufficient. The new approach – Executive core qualifications (ECQ), known also as Accreditation, is much more useful to a civil servant. The qualities stated on: skills, ability to manage talent, ability to communicate, strategic thinking, flexibility, vision, team building, accountability, customer service, political savvy etc.

The layout of professional qualifications stretches on an axis from what is necessary – basic education and leads up to what is merely desirable or optional – life-long learning. The latter sometimes can be destructive in times of crises. Depending on this axis we can locate a person considering how much he/she realises, how ambitious his goals are, namely how important it is to be qualified, to be lined-up in a professional group. The axis also denotes the personal power / ability to pass from the general level of knowledge to the technical one; from the theoretical overview to the practical one; more precisely from job proficiency to job performance.

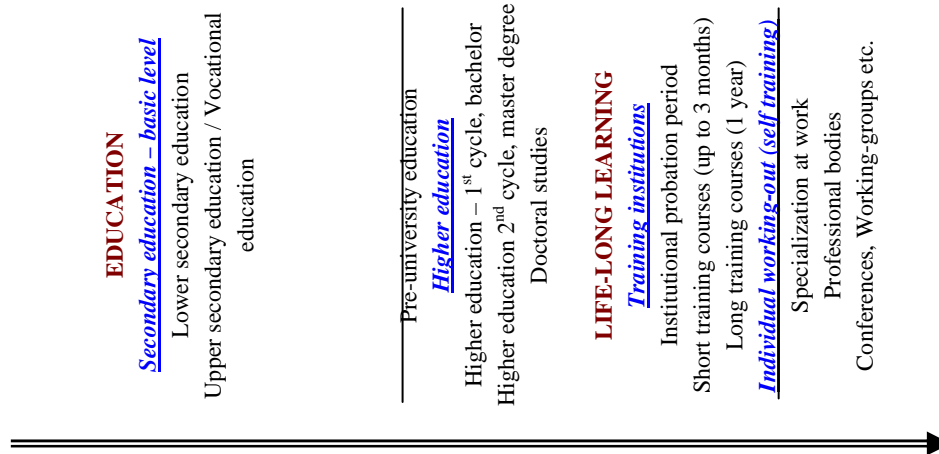


Figure 5. The axis of professional qualification

Not surprisingly, the position along the axis depends on a number of objective and/or subjective factors including the stage of development reached, the market mechanisms, the supply of and demand for specific educational qualifications, political considerations, the assignment system, family and personal connections, patronage, vested interests and individual's attitudes.

Concerning the situation created by the crises and by the labour market, we must admit that young people entering the labour force for the first time cannot find a job commensurate with their educational qualifications. We also must admit that there is a need of employment cuts, but based on professionalization.

4. The Best and the Worst Jobs in Public Administration

Every profession operates in terms of a basic set of fictions about itself. These provide the profession with a comforting self-image, some stereotype to help meet and adapt to the varied and often drastic contingencies of everyday operation. Gradations and differentiation within a profession tend to be ignored by the public. The public image of a profession, although it may be quite different from the profession's self-image, has the same effect of polarizing attention upon certain selected areas or levels of professional activity. (Smith, p. 413)

Indeed, the public is usually unaware of the range of variations. Professional organizations itself tend to impose an image of massive unity upon the public, which may have an adverse effect upon both profession and public. What happens in many professions is that the self image is selected out from among the many

elements which it possesses. For example, the stability factor of the public functions is the one which imposes the main image over public administration; ‘nobody can move you from there’ for sure you will get the retirement pension occupying the same job.

The public’s image of the profession may become confused and inadequate. In Romania the people often cannot clearly distinguish among positions of public dignity and public functions.

In our study we have determined which are the worst and the best 10 jobs you can get today in public administration. As we can see in the best 10 jobs we have not only management public functions. The executive functions are desired by 40% of the respondents.

The high public functions and the management ones attract only 60%. Even so, the first and the second place within the rank are occupied by those functions which a graduate can occupy after its completion of studies. In the worst 10 jobs we will find most of those jobs which are in local public administration 60% and also those with high responsibility.

We can conclude that the graduates of public administration studies do not have a pattern to follow for their professional career. Most of them want to become directly high officials even if they do not have experience for it. That means they do not know yet the career path they must follow. Such knowledge needs to be given in the educational system, we should tell them what they have to expect after graduation.

Table 1. The best 10 jobs in public administration

1.	Counselor
2.	Inspector
3.	General secretary
4.	Governmental inspector
5.	Chief of service
6.	Head office
7.	Specialised referent
8.	City secretary
9.	Executive director
10.	Legal adviser

Table 2. The worst 10 jobs in public administration

1.	Chief of the prefecture office
2.	Chief architect
3.	Sub-prefect
4.	Prefect
5.	Deputy general secretary
6.	Deputy executive director
7.	Referent
8.	Deputy general director
9.	Assistant
10.	General commissioner

As we have presented in the beginning of the study, the financial crises created a gap in the public administration profession pyramid – no one wants to work at the

local level, 70% of the institutions identified in the survey are from the central level. For this reason we have tried to find out which are the most attractive institutions for further civil servants, and we have made a top of 10 public institutions to work for.

Table 3. The best 10 public institutions

1. City hall
2. Ministry of environment
3. Financial guard
4. The institution of prefect
5. General Secretariat of the Government
6. Ministry of defence
7. Ministry of transport
8. County council
9. National Agency for Environmental Protection
10. Ministry of Public Finance

The mirage of central public administration attracts more people because they believe that is the 'basket' with all the desirable things in a profession. They do not think that you have to go step by step on the 'X' axis.

5. Instead of Conclusion

The essence of professionalism is expert knowledge; the essence of professional autonomy is control over the personnel and their evaluation. Experts demand the right to hire, evaluate, promote, and control their peers. Professionals argue that they are the one entitled to evaluate the professional knowledge and expertise of other professionals. Some specific skills or cluster of skills become the 'hard core' which provides each profession with a distinctive focus. Such skills are not always uniformly distributed throughout the profession. We saw that professional qualification in public administration involves several factors which are interconnected in the same process.

It becomes important, therefore, in professional analysis, to know who possesses the nuclear skills and who does not, since the latter representatives may feel, or even be, limited in the full exercise of their professional competence. (Smith, p. 414)

This paper has studied the differential sensitivity within the professional qualification. It points out some problems involving the integration of public functions in the desirable area of jobs seekers. Social differentiation within modern professions created differential sensitivity to a professional career within public administration. For this we need further researches to see why the public functions are not desirable. Also, for a better professional analysis we need to answer questions, such as: 'Which skills are available and to whom?', 'Which are selected and rejected and by whom and why?'

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