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Professionalization of Mentoring in the Public Sector

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Abstract: The professionalization of mentoring in the public sector has evolved from an informal practice to a structured system, which aims to transform the way in which civil servants develop their careers. Mentoring is no longer just a transfer of technical knowledge, but an institutional development technique that aims at efficient integration and increased individual performance. There is a clear emphasis on training and professional mentoring, based on specific skills but also on mentoring modules focused on strategic leadership, digital skills, compatibility between subjects and the development of a personalized career path. The professionalization of mentoring in the public sector will take into account questionnaire techniques, monitoring of evolution and impact evaluation. Thus, the identification of the psychological and professional needs of the beneficiary and the use of tools to track the progress of the mentee will use outcome evaluation methodologies to ensure the quality of continuous training and which will support the managerial reputation of the public sector. The main directions will target decision-making and strategic efficiency, human resources modernization, impact on organizational culture but also institutional resilience. The final impact of the professionalization of mentoring in the public sector will lead to a professional public administration and a better relationship between the state and the citizen. The impact of this professionalization process can be analyzed with indicators that emphasize process efficiency, skills development, organizational climate, reduction of integration times and project performance.

Keywords: Public Management; Mentoring; Public Administration

JEL Classification: H11, M54, H83

1. Introduction

These In the public sector, to professionalize mentoring, it is useful to transfer practical notions from an informal “experience exchange” process into a strategic management tool, thus facilitating knowledge transfer and aligning organizational culture with high standards of ethics and performance.

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2. Strategic and Institutional Framework

For mentoring to become a professional practice, it is necessary to be clearly defined at the level of public institutions, by establishing a new organizational structure that will handle the launch of the program, the recruitment of mentors, the evaluation of results and the management of good practice networks. The formalization of the professionalization process of mentoring is achieved through clear, traceable and periodically evaluated learning objectives between the mentor and the mentee (the person who supports), which presupposes the existence of a mentoring agreement and an individual development plan in the mentoring process. The rigor and clarity of the professionalization process of mentoring is determined by the two pillars, namely the mentoring role and the individual development plan.

Since we are in the public sector, the mentoring agreement is intended to be a formal document, which will be signed and assumed from the beginning of the mentoring program, by the mentor, the mentee and of course the human resources representative of the applicant organization.

The pragmatism of the mentoring agreement is imposed by the existence of fundamental elements, namely: confidentiality, frequency and size of meetings, roles and responsibilities of the parties and the duration of the program. Thus, by ensuring and respecting confidentiality, trust is guaranteed and thus the discussions remain private. The size and frequency of meetings is useful to store in a clear and precise calendar and it is advisable to be approximately 120 minutes, with a periodicity of 10-14 days and will be established for a maximum duration of one year. The establishment of the roles and responsibilities of the parties will focus on the mentor's guiding role, and the mentee will focus on the self-learning role.

Regarding the individual development plan, as a working tool in the professionalization process of mentoring, it will determine the transformation of career management objectives into concrete actions and activities. This plan is drawn up, implemented and monitored by the mentee but with the support of the mentor. Of course, the individual development plan will include objectives (such as: "Going through, understanding and mastering the procedure for ensuring decisional transparency"), concrete actions (such as: reading the legislation in the field of ensuring decisional transparency and participating in specific meetings), success indicators (such as: reports, tasks completed without errors) and necessary resources (such as: access to electronic platforms, training courses, the time that the institution allocates for this purpose).

Therefore, the benefits of this formalization in the process of professionalizing mentoring are highlighted, following the line of accountability, value brought to the public sector and objectivity. Accepting the calendar and tasks of the mentoring process, both parties, mentor and mentee, show seriousness, and human resources within the public entity can evaluate the progress of the process. Through objectivity, the mentoring process reduces, eliminates and/or avoids approaches to topics that are not relevant for career management and ensuring performance.

2. Public Sector Mentor Training and Skills

The expertise and experience of mentors is not enough to achieve positive results in mentoring, but it is recommended that they have a well-defined role as learning facilitators and thus the transition to professional mentoring is made. Therefore, to ensure the success of the mentoring process in the public sector, the mentor cannot be just a senior civil servant, but must be a performance facilitator. The professionalization of this role involves a well-defined skills profile and a specific training program,

which will not lack counseling, ethics and integrity.

Mentors in public administration have an essential role in consolidating institutional values, being known as a subject frequently supported through specific training campaigns and through active listening techniques, constructive feedback, etc.

The skills of a mentor for the public sector can be recognized in relational skills and strategic skills.

Relational skills concern questioning and active listening techniques, which highlight the ability to ask open-ended questions that can stimulate reflection, as opposed to the possibility of offering specific solutions. Through constructive feedback, the ability to evaluate the mentee's performance is sought in an objective manner and based on the positive points and strengths of the areas for improvement and without the presence of demotivation. An important role for relational skills is played by emotional intelligence and empathy, as it takes place against a background of managing bureaucratic ties but also of pressures coming from the "political world of the public sector" which leads to frustrations, which if not eliminated or diminished will raise the test of the parties to the mentoring process.

Strategic competencies refer to the systemic vision, the management practiced and known by the parties of the mentoring process, critical thinking but also the applied ethics. Through an appropriate understanding of inter-institutional mechanisms and the implementation of public policies, a systemic vision with a beneficial and positive impact on society can be ensured. Regarding the management of the parties of the mentoring process, an important role is played by the ability to master, know and constructively manipulate the relationships between career civil servants, politicians and civil society. Through critical thinking, the ability to guide the mentee in making difficult decisions is developed, based on criteria and principles of integrity and legality worthy of the public sector.

3. Professionalization of Mentoring at the Level of City Halls

Professionalizing mentoring at the level of city halls can bring concrete, rapid and efficient changes in the way local administration operates, which can be reflected in organizational performance indicators, the quality of public services and institutional resilience. We cannot approach this topic without thinking about operational optimization, reducing bureaucracy, streamlining human resources management, improving the relationship with community citizens and increasing integrity.

Operational optimization and bureaucracy reduction can be pillars of a city hall's activity, through measures regarding shortening the document cycle, decreasing the number of errors and through an accentuated and accelerated digitalization. In order to develop, prepare, sign, approve and implement provisions, local council decisions, reports, opinions, authorizations, it is necessary for new employees in the institution to learn from mentors the optimal and fluid "route" of the document cycle. The decrease in the number of errors will be based on complex cases or with a high degree of difficulty and through direct guidance and detailed explanation of the possibilities of resolution, the elimination of procedural errors that most often lead to complaints and/or litigation from citizens but also from other public entities will be achieved. Measures regarding accelerated digitalization within city halls will help mentors use electronic document management techniques and platforms, so as to ensure a rapid transition from the "rail file" to "digital flows".

The efficiency of human resources management takes into account the planning of administrative successions, the reduction of costs of recruiting civil servants and the assessment based on competencies. Saving resources allocated for repeated recruitment competition activities will be required by the rapid integration of civil servants, especially in the case of beginners whose fluctuation will decrease. The

fluidization of the administrative activity of human resources will be materialized through a planning of the succession of career management stages, as the public entity will use the expertise from the organizational memory through the transfer made during the mentoring program. This planning of administrative succession will determine the elimination of the blockage in the city hall when “key” civil servants retire or transfer to other public institutions. Another important and determining aspect of the efficiency of resource management is represented by the competency-based assessment. In this regard, the results monitored within the individual development plan within the mentoring process can provide civil servants in the field of human resources with data, information and indicators for the promotion of civil servants.

Improving the relationship with citizens, in the mentoring process and for its professionalization, takes into account the standardization of the quality of services and resistance to political pressures. The standardization of the quality of services provided and provided to citizens takes into account the experience, trust, but also the clarity, kindness and promptness of officials, regardless of whether they are beginners or experienced. The moral support provided within the mentoring process offers newly hired officials the “supreme” argument to refuse and not apply practices and activities to legal limits or political pressures.

4. The Direct Impact of Professionalizing Mentoring on the Public Sector

The efficiency of professionalizing mentoring in the public sector can be measured by establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) that will help city halls monitor progress and transform qualitative data into clear administrative justifications and arguments. These indicators can be identified within the implementation of mentoring processes and are: quantitative monitoring indicators in the field of human resources, public service quality indicators and evaluation indicators.

Quantitative monitoring indicators in the field of human resources will identify and measure the efficiency of the adaptability and integration process, as follows: the retention rate of newcomers, the degree of autonomy and the process of achieving the objectives in the individual development plan. The retention rate of newcomers will track the number/percentage of newcomer civil servants who remain in the public sector after they complete the internship period for newcomers. The degree of autonomy, as an indicator for assessing the impact of professionalization of mentoring in the public sector, will monitor and analyze the number of days required for a newly hired civil servant, who is provided by the mentor, to resolve cases independently and without procedural errors. The rate of achievement of the objectives established in the individual development plan of the mentee will represent the percentage of achievement of the objectives.

The public service quality indicators will highlight how mentoring has a direct influence on collaboration and interactions with citizens and the socio-economic environment, through the response time to petitions and the rate of appeals to petitions. In public sector organizational structures where the mentoring process was applied, the duration of resolution and the issuance of documents will be analyzed, as well as the number of complaints and notifications filed as a result of procedural defects committed by newly hired civil servants.

The evaluation indicators will use the correlation of the results obtained in the mentoring process with the annual evaluation of the professional performances of civil servants and will refer to the weight of the qualifications and the promotion rate. The reduction of discrepancies and subjectivity in the process of evaluating the professional performances of civil servants will be analyzed through meetings, analysis

interviews, “confrontation of evaluation opinions”. For the promotion rate, the number of civil servants who promote to a higher class or even to public management positions will be monitored and based on the skills acquired during the mentoring process.

The professionalization of mentoring in the public sector generates clear benefits both for the officials involved and for the efficiency of the entire local administration, where both the mentor and the mentee are found. Thus, the mentee will integrate much faster, in the sense that he will understand in a short time the document circuit, the applied legislation but also the inter-institutional dynamics, he will be more confident in his own professional “strengths” which will ensure professional validation, and he will create a much faster relationship system both within the department where he works, and with other organizational structures within the public sector. In this context, the mentor will have official recognition, the possibility of career development and updating of knowledge and information. By involving the mentor in the mentoring process, the possibility of obtaining higher qualifications in the annual assessment of professional performance is recognized. By assisting a mentee, the mentor validates leadership skills that can be taken into account when promoting to a management position, whether temporary or permanent. The modern working methods used in the mentoring process will encourage the “dialogue” between the mentor and the mentee and will adapt to digital and technological tools.

5. Conclusion

Professionalizing mentoring in the public sector can lay the foundations for ensuring and maintaining administrative continuity and strategic knowledge transfer. Thus, informal “guidance” can be ensured in a tool that can be controlled by institutional development and will achieve increased efficiency of human resources, increased motivation and reduced mobility of civil servants, uniformity of skills and quality of public services, an institutional mentality based on collaboration and performance and the development of institutional memory.

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