

ROMANIAN PUBLIC SERVANT PROFESSIONAL LIFE: A QUANTATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract: *The perception of the Romanian Public Service Officer came out rather negative according to the most recent public opinion barometers. Our paper sets out to investigate using –inquiry technique- how it feels to be on the other side of the counter, and to what extent the multifaceted professional life of the Romanian Public Service Officer is influenced by various determinants like: work related conditions, education and training, citizens behaviour when facing administration staff, general social environment, specific laws and regulations, politics, aspects of personal life etc. in order to better satisfy their ultimate goal, namely to best serve the citizens.*

Key words: *public servant; professional life; quantitative approach; Romania*

Romania, as a EU member state, has an obligation to fulfil, in due time, the stipulations committed to, in this regard, through the Adhesion Treaty. One of the top priority fields of the post-adhesion strategy is the continuance of public administration reforms. Its fundamental objective is to consolidate the administrative capacity through the implementation of the “acquis communautaire”. The “administrative values” of the European Space, namely: transparency, predictability, responsibility, adaptability, accountability and

efficiency; have to be implemented and integrated into all the administrative institutions and activities at all levels, and their application should be verified by an independent control system.

The foreign and local investors' decisions greatly depend on the quality, efficiency and credibility of the public sector, hence the need for its continuous adaptation to the rapid changes of the economy and society.

Even in the international arena, the public administration became an essential factor that determines the nation's competitive advantage.

Starting with September 2001, the complex process of public administration reforms has recorded important progress, not only at the institutional level, but also legal wise². In a nutshell, the efficiency improvement efforts have to adhere to the design of a new framework for public administration, the supply of high quality public services, the modernization of institutional structures and the increase in transparency of their transactions, the development of a citizen oriented administration and the convergence towards the EU standards for the public service quality.³

Unfortunately, the implementation process, especially the practical application of the proposed reforms has not recorded sufficient advance. The mere setting up of a legal framework does not automatically imply solutions for the identified faults. Public administration with its own mechanisms and regulations often intervene between the promulgation of a law and its expected impact; and this might either enhance or block the beneficial effects of a specific law or governmental policy.

The reform of the administrative system does not necessarily mean the elaboration and the improvement of a legal framework, nor the mere design of an appropriate institutional framework, not even the design of recruitment, career management, standards and control mechanism of the civil servants performance programs. One important ingredient has to be particularly addressed: a new perspective on civil servants' perception, a new approach to assess their activity through perceived efficiency and effectiveness. This need is easily understandable as the human resource of administration is the backbone of the reformed framework, its warrant and the portent of profound changes.

Practically, the reform's pulse and its progress should be sought at the desk counter, as interface between the administration and the citizens, between the civil servant and the beneficiary of his or her effort. That is why the reform's success will be felt only when the citizens' needs are fulfilled through the efficient performance of public administration, as well as through the provision of better information to be made available to the public at large.

Consequently, a modern administration requires high professional standard that manifests itself through the quality of work, the obtained outcomes and the results produced, through a positive administrative culture, the stability and the political neutrality of civil servants. The creation of a professional public function, and the provision of continuous training for all employees of the public administration are essential requirements for such professional up-grading process.

We consider that the whole activity of the human resource management has to focus on the promotion and the maintenance of an organizational culture able to enforce values like: respect for citizens, teamwork collaboration, initiative encouragement, professionalism and assured certainty.

In order to achieve a continuous improvement of individuals' performance, the human resources management has to employ the following leverages:

- Employees motivation;
- Weaknesses identification;
- Well-structured work teams;
- Continuous staff training

The majority of the studies carried out up to date, indicate that more than half of the urban population of Romania perceive as weak, or very weak, their relationship and interface with authorities and public institutions that offer services to the public whether directly or indirectly. The majority of the citizens are not satisfied with the general way of communication system, the organization system of the public relations and the imperfections of the juridical system. A recent poll regarding the perception of the citizens of public function has been carried out in 2005, financed by Phare funds⁴. The conclusions confirm the same, unfavourable view of the public of their public service and its systems and processes, as well as its operatives.

The consultation of the staff of public administration on a series of particularities of the public function, took place for the first time in Romania⁵ in 2004. Since then, the Public Function Barometer (*BFP*)-2004, has been drafted.

Since the BFP – 2004, more than two years have passed. In the meantime, on political arena many changes have occurred and the public administration reform has continued, mainly due to the country commitments to the process of EU adhesion. Even if only for these two reasons, we have qualified it as appropriate to carry out an inquiry aimed at capturing the most recent perceptions, attitudes and values regarding the different components of the public administration activity.

Even though the comparability criteria with the BFP 2004 are not met, and despite the fact that we shall refrain from making the results available to the country's population, and, despite the methodological drawbacks and limitations that have just been highlighted, we consider that this inquiry will prove to be a valuable tool for various decision making level for both local and central public administration. Through the newly collated results, it offers an updated image of the issues regarding the public administration staff, as they are perceived at their workplace, and their inner thoughts regarding the modernisation process of the public administration system.

The stated objectives of the inquiry were:

- To characterize the human relationships, the working environment and the promotion policy of the public administration;
- To asses the contentment level of the civil servant with respect to the type of activity he/she undertakes and the obtained income;
- To analyse the employees attitude towards the periodical evaluation and the life long learning concept;

The inquiry sample comprised 1939 civil servants from city halls, financial administrations, police stations and prefectures, all located in Bucharest and surrounding counties, as well as from the central administration (various ministries, Parliament, etc.). Due to the large size of the sample we can safely consider that the conclusions would be deemed relevant for the whole country. The method for gathering information was the direct interview and the period was between 1st and 15th March 2007. The interview operators

were the students from the Faculty of Management, Public Administration Section from the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies.

The Analysis and Interpretation of the Inquiry's Results

1. The characterization of interpersonal relationships, of the working environment and of the promotion policies of public administration

The way in which public civil servants appreciate interpersonal relationships inside public administration institutions is presented in the chart no. 1.

As it can be gleaned from the chart, the majority of respondents, reckon the relationship with the boss and with their colleagues to be good or very good (86,6%), as well as with their direct boss (80,6%).

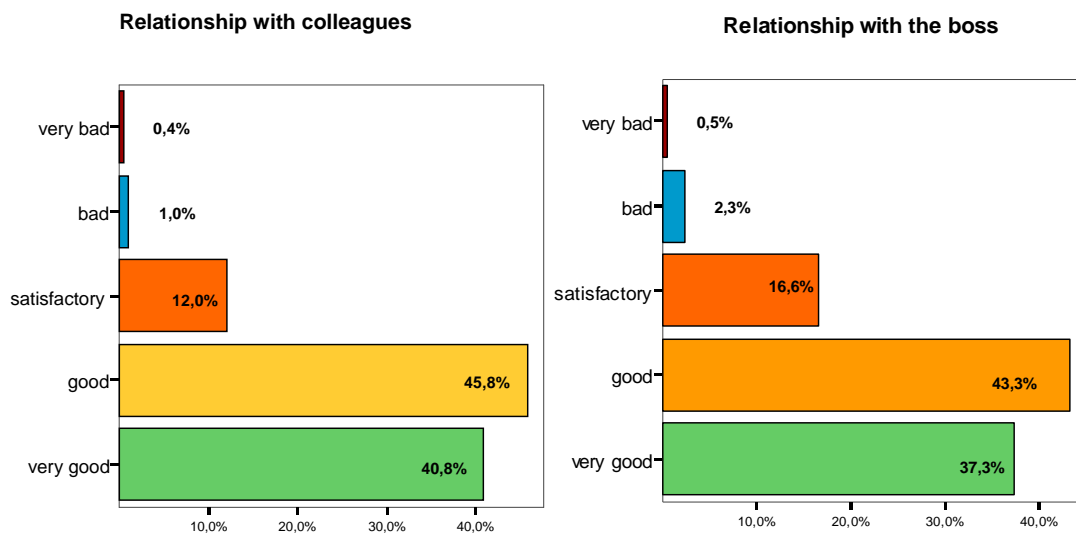


Chart no. 1. Appreciating interpersonal relationships

In order to get a better picture of the relationship with the direct boss, concerning whether they perceive that direct boss to be corrupt or not, especially in view of the fact that the Corruption Perception Index for Romania is a rather negative one at 3.1 out of 10.00. That was considered to be a delicate and somewhat sensitive question and was thus placed in the middle of the questionnaire. It was feared that soliciting a direct answer to such a tough question may have induced evasive answers.

Out of six positive attributes: (friendly, hard working, methodical, perseverant, helpful, honest), and six negative ones: (aggressive, corrupt, conservative, contemptuous, negligent, selfish), respondents were asked to mark only the ones that he/she reckons it closely associates with their boss's conduct.

In summary; by adding one point for each positive attribute and subtracting one point for each negative attribute; a final score was calculated.

The repartition of civil servants according to the score given to the direct boss is shown in the chart no. 2. The mean value of the score is 2,344, which suggest an inclination of the balance towards the appreciation of positive attributes.

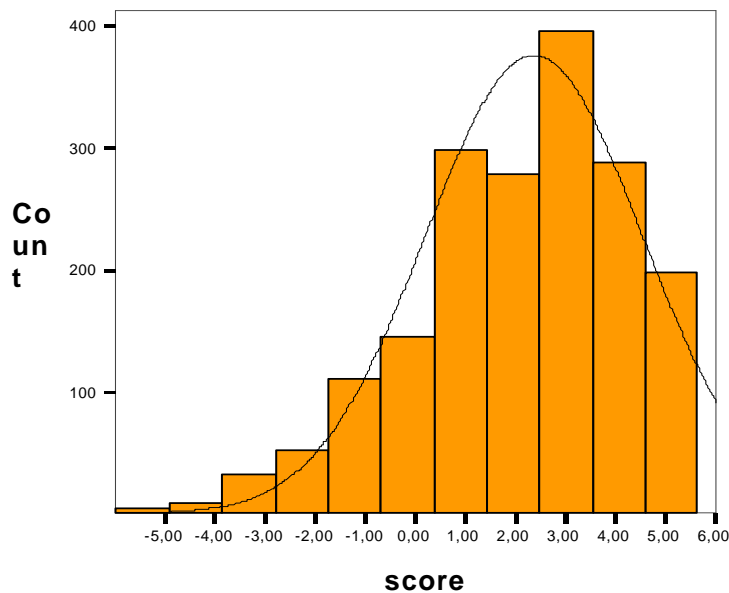


Chart no. 2. Repartition of respondents after the score obtained

Further, the study undertook the analysis of the way in which civil servants perceive the importance given to the promotion policy based on the following criteria: the level of qualification; performance, time served experience at post, personal relationships and attention given to the boss.

The respondents were asked to evaluate, according to their own opinion, on a scale from 1 to 10, each of the above-mentioned criteria. Beginning with the grade given, a mean score was calculated for each characteristic. In order to establish the importance of the advantages, the statistical significance of the difference between the mean scores was tested. The Student test for pair observations was used for dependent⁶ samples. Based upon the results obtained using SPSS test, the hierarchy of advantages was established, as shown in the chart no. 3.

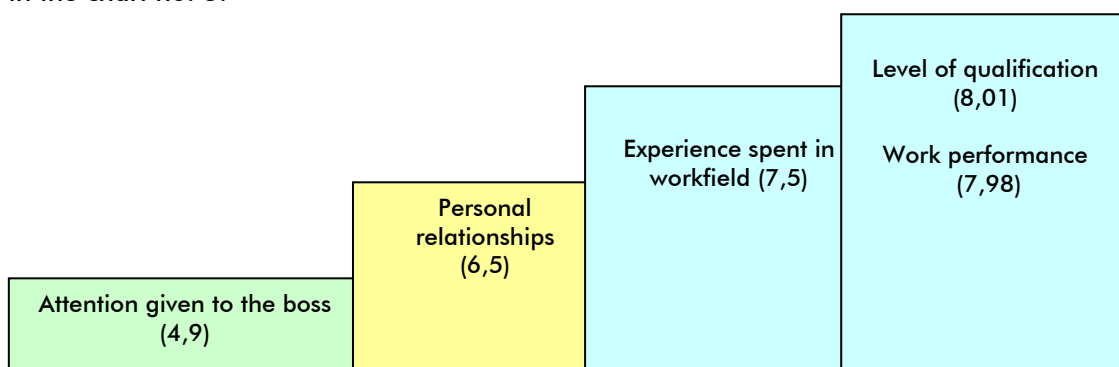


Chart no. 3. The Hierarchy of criteria in the promotion policy

After applying the Student test for the characteristics „Level of qualification” and „Work performances”, the calculated value was $t=1,016$ ($\alpha=0,310$), therefore the hypothesis of score equality was accepted. The values obtained after applying Student test

for the other characteristics point to the existence of significant differences between them, corresponding to a level of significance of at least 0,01.

2. Assessing civil servants' contentment level regarding both activity and income

The civil servants' contentment level was measured considering the following aspects:

1. Work schedule
2. Work conditions
3. Incomes
4. The job
5. Horizontal communication existent between different departments or services
6. Vertical communication (tasks on a superior hierarchic line)

The respondents presented a level of contentment generally good or very good about the majority of the aspects analyzed, with the notable exception of the income factor, for which 48% of respondents stated that they are not contented or very discontented. The average wage recorded at the end of the year 2006 in public administration was about 510 RON, (150 euros a month), considerably lower than in other sectors and in comparison with the wages of European civil servants. In this context, the relative low wages would constitute the main reason that would determine them to search for a better-paid place to work. (47,8%).

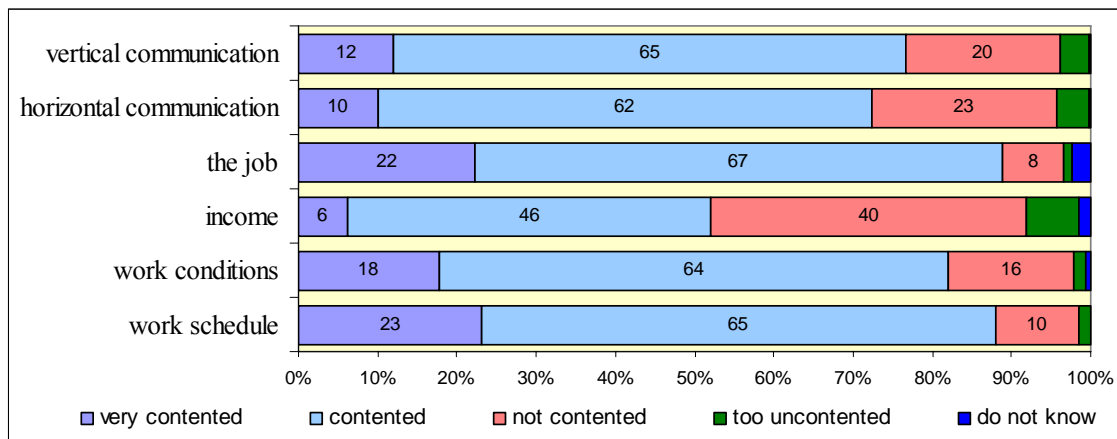


Chart no. 4. The level of contentment about different aspects related to the place of work

The evaluation of job satisfaction contentment level about is indicates an average score on a scale from 0 to 10. Data analysis based on the contingency tables highlight that the age influences the general level of contentment regarding the job (the calculated value of χ^2 test - 114,2 is statistically significant for a confidence level of 97,3%).

50% of young civil servants aged under 30 years old count themselves as very contented about their job, whilst 53% of those aged 30-49 years old are very contented, rising to 65.3%, of those aged above 50 years old.. The larger extent of contentment of older aged civil servants could be explained through the fact that either they come from the administrative apparatus of older regime, or they come from the disposed laborers following restructuring of the industrial colossus.

There are categories of persons still active who value the preservation of a certain social status and assurance of a stable living, safe from the professional challenges specific to a the private sector of a market economy.

As for the influence of auxiliary variables „gender“ and „studies“ on the level of contentment, it can be stated that it is not statistically significant.

In order to complete the picture the respondents have concerning their place of work, they were asked to specify which from the following statements are true:

1. It is a stressful job;
2. It is a safe job;
3. It is generally respected by people;
4. I have a convenient working schedule;
5. My initiative is being encouraged;
6. I can take a leave off in no matter what period of the year (flexible holiday);
7. I feel it is useful for people;
8. It is a job with several responsibilities;
9. What I do is interesting;

The majority of the respondents (90,9%) believe that the activity they develop involves responsibility, and. 79,2% say that what they do is interesting, while 75,5% reckon that the job is appropriate for them, in accordance with their own capabilities.

Unfortunately, only 51,8% say that their initiative is being encouraged, which does not match the objectives of the new strategic management concepts of human resource development in public administration.

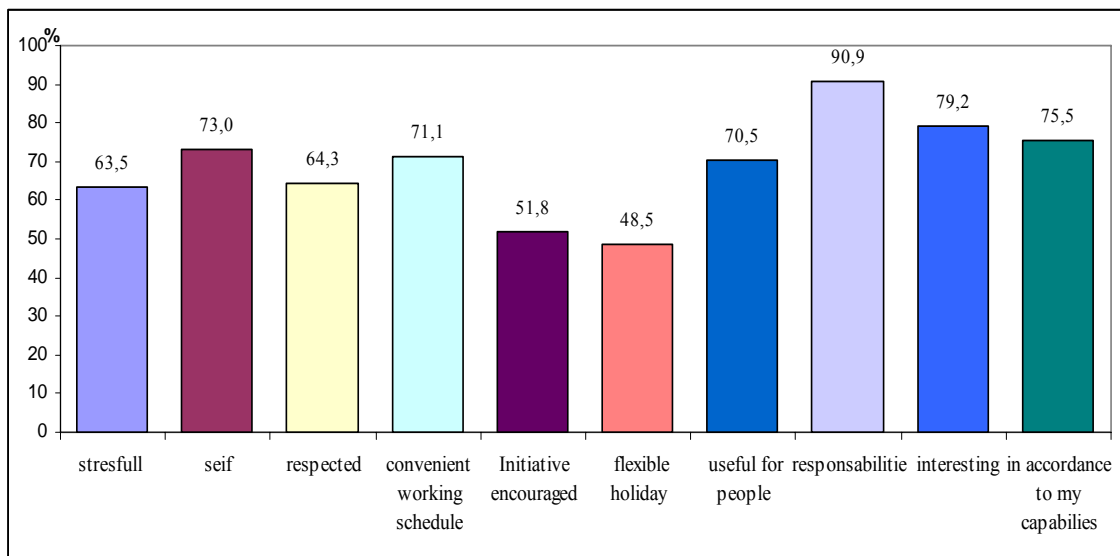


Chart no. 5. Characteristics of the work place

Although the majority of the respondents rate their wages as relatively low, their perception regarding the level of living assured by the income obtained, place them in a privileged situation compared to the general situation at the country level. For comparisons, information was taken from the database of the Public Opinion Barometer of October 2006.

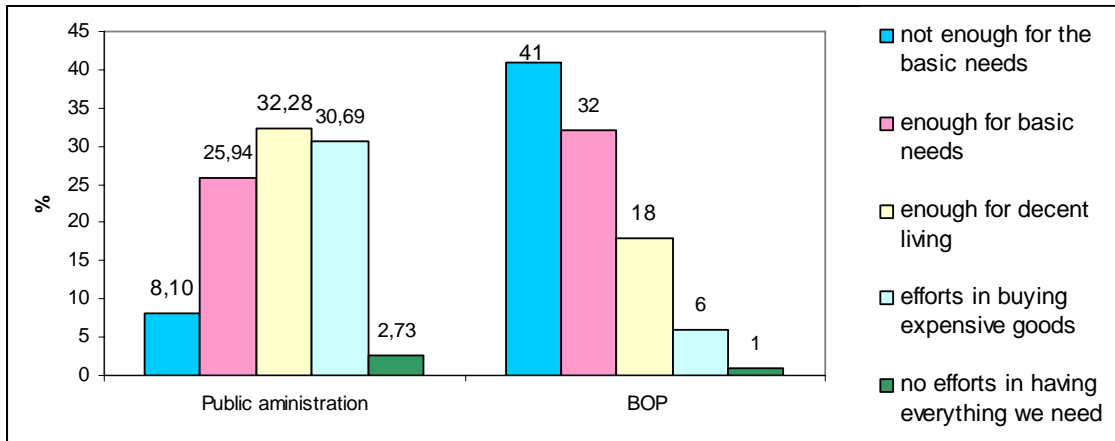


Chart no. 6. Appreciating the level of living assured by the income obtained

3. The analysis of employees attitude towards the periodical evaluation and continuous professional training

The evaluation of employees' performance is the „fundamental activity of the human resources management developed in order to determine to what extent the employees of an organization efficiently accomplish the tasks and responsibilities they have“.⁷

Even though it is essential, the periodical evaluation represents for the employees „a potential threat, being also an activity difficult enough and, sometimes, controversial or even detested, and more than often, the preoccupations in this field are sources of discontent, because they are associated with the sacking of personnel“.⁸

The agreement with periodical evaluation can be observed in chart no. 7. The percentage of the ones that agreed is 74% of respondents.

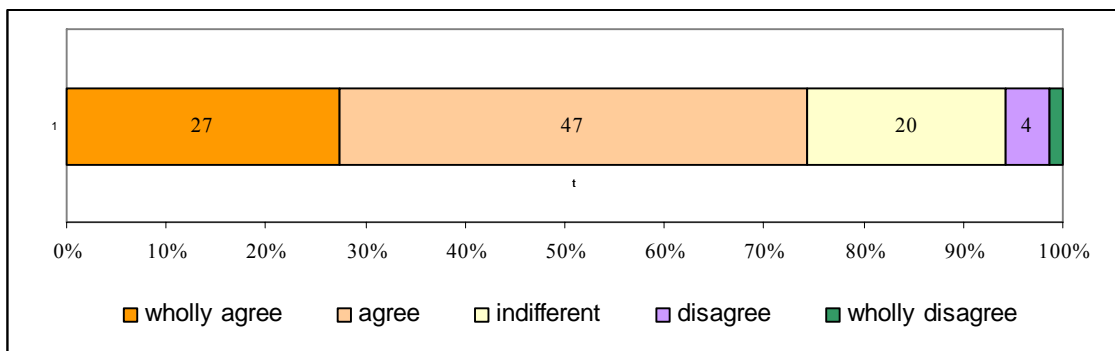


Chart no. 7. The agreement with periodical evaluation

The greater part of the civil servants interviewed think that the evaluation would have to be made by their bosses or managers and in a smaller proportion by internal evaluation commissions (chart no. 8).

This option could be explained by and through the relationship with direct boss, appreciated positively by most part of the wage earners. It is possible that this appreciation to be the proof of some practices of traditional administration which functions on a *clientele* based system. The calculated value of test χ^2 is very high - 249,8, which points out to the

existence of a connection between these variables. The value of Cramer's coefficient V° is 0,59, suggesting that this correlation is strong.

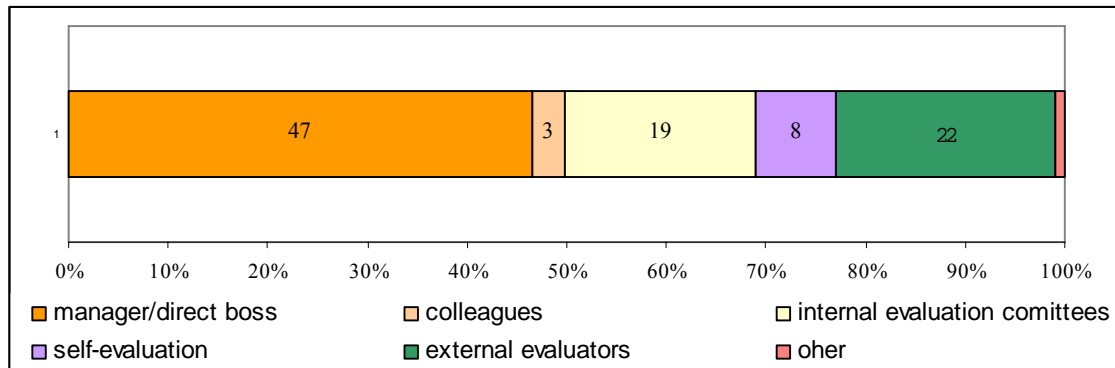


Chart no. 8. The option for evaluator

The reform in the public administration sector aims at improving the efficiency of their activity by assuring a high level of the personnel instruction, e.g., by organizing training. The wish to follow such trainings is high (see chart no. 8). 66% of the respondents consider that foreign languages courses as useful. The courses for achieving/improving the knowledge in the informatics domain are considered important, while, 63% of the respondents consider it a necessity to participate in at least one course.

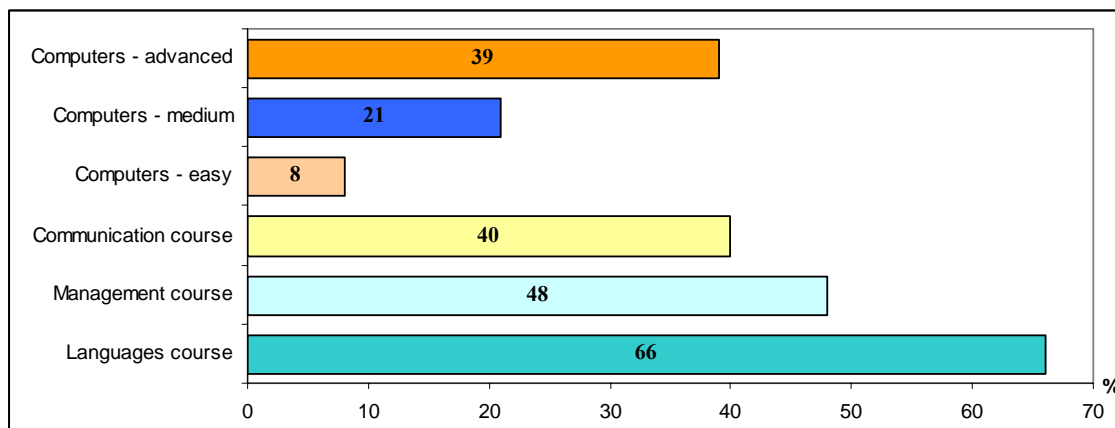


Chart no. 9. The options for training courses

Conclusions

The results of the inquiry pointed out a series of specific aspects of public administration's activity.

Positive aspects:

- **The working environment** is quoted as being a favorable one, the majority of respondents considering it as being good or very good, both relationships with colleagues as well as with their direct boss;
- The most important **promotion criteria** are perceived to be the level of qualification and attained performance;
- **The level of contentment** is in general good or very good towards the majority of specific aspects of the undertaken activity;

- The manifested interest of the respondents towards raising their **level of instruction**, through participating at different courses of professional improvement.

Negative aspects:

- Although they do not occupy top places in the hierarchy, the relatively high scores obtained by the criteria – „personal relationships” and „attentions given to the boss” prove the **maintenance of clientele promotion based practices**;
- **The perception of the existence of corruption** at the level of direct boss – only 55,4% of the respondents perceive the direct boss as being correct;
- **The discontentment of the obtained income** (48% of the respondents declare that they are not contented or very not contented), assuring for approximately 67% of the respondents the minimum requirements;
- **Discouragement of personal initiative**, only 51,8% of the respondents considering that this is promoted at the management level of organization they work for;
- **The instability of management of public function** under the influence of the modifications of the **political sphere** (48% of the respondents indicated the change of the leading team after the change of the ruling political force).

“On the other side of the barricade” the most disturbing aspects are the ones related to the citizen’s behavior (not respecting the behavior and the cleanliness rules of the public space; physical and verbal violence) and less the ones regarding their lack of knowledge (the lack of knowledge on the problem issues, the low level of general instruction; the lack of civic culture).

After two years of accelerated reforms in public administration, the perceptions and values of the civil servants reflect the positive effects of the modernization process, as measured against some practices and values related to a traditional administration still lingering on.

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² <http://modernizare.mai.gov.ro/documente/analiza%20stadiului%20modernizarea%20a%20administratiei.pdf>, Law 251/2006 (republished) regarding Public Servants Statute; Law no. 7/2004 regarding The Code of Conduct of the Public Servants etc.

³ http://www.anfp-map.ro/strategii_rapoarte_studii.php?sectiune=Studii&view=25

⁴ Sondajul *Percepția funcției publice de către cetățeni*, realizat în cadrul proiectului *Transparență și etică în administrația publică*, de IRSOP Market Research & Consulting Ltd., Agenda 21, UE - Proiect Phare, Agenția Națională a Funcționarilor Publici, December 2005, București.

⁵ Institute for Public Policy, *Public function Barometer –October 2004*, The Gallup Organization Romania, Bucharest, 2004;

⁶ Test Statistics is: $t = \frac{\bar{d}}{S_d / \sqrt{n}}$ having: $S_d = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (d_i - \bar{d})^2}{n-1}}$ where: \bar{d} = means of differences

$d_i = x_{1i} - x_{2i}$; n = the number of pair observations; S_d = standard deviation of d_i variable.

⁷ Manolescu, A. **The management of human resources, 3rd Edition a III^a**, Economic Ed., Bucharest, 2001, p. 389

⁸ Idem, p. 386

⁹ $V = \sqrt{\chi^2 / n(c-1)}$ where n is the sample size and c the smallest value from the number of lines and columns.