FEATURES OF CAREER MANAGEMENT IN ROMANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to present the features of career management in Romanian higher education, having to consider the fact that the changing of the political system previous to 1989 led to major changes regarding all the other sectors of social life. The transition to a market economy, decentralization and separation of powers, as well as the new perspectives that the education system was offered have led to an acute crisis of this system, based on the inflexibility of the system, on its impossibility to quickly adapt to new social conditions, on the legal vacuum and the acute decline of the Romanian economy. Under these circumstances, the educational reform appears as a utopia, as an absurd struggle with both external factors and internal ones. The didactic staff's understanding of the new social mechanisms by staff and building a motivating career could lead to the restoration of the lost balance.

JEL classification: I2, M12

Keywords: career, higher education

Introduction

Concerns about career choice and development issues have emerged long ago under the form of vocational orientation and reorientation, both in our country and especially abroad. Particular attention has been given to vocational orientation regarding low-age school children, starting from the idea that the choice of a profession is an important decision, highly irrevocable in nature. Once choosing a profession is difficult to change it because it involves waste of time and energy. From a social point of view, abandoning a profession for which you have invested money and energy is a waste both for the individual and society.

Vocational orientation and career development have been dealt with more from an individual perspective, the organizational one being only implicit. Whatever the tendency to denote a concept at a given moment, reality is the same (Manolescu et al., 2007). Whether it is called vocational orientation and counseling or career development and counseling, you cannot neglect individual desires, ambitions and motivations and the demands of society or of an organization cannot disappear, even if they are different; the conditions of putting it into practice make the only difference.

Career management is the process of planning and implementation of goals, strategies and plans that enable an organization to meet its human resources needs, and individuals to fulfill their career goals (Klatt et al., 1985).

Career management plans and shapes the individuals’ progress within an organization according to the assessment of organizational needs, as well as to the individual performances, potential and preferences of its members (Armstrong, 2009).
Career development is an organic process that does not follow a preset program (Burlea Şchiopoiu, 2008). Each career stage leads to a higher level of self-understanding as a result of success or failure, reshaping the way in which the individual sees himself with his own potential and limitations.

The main objectives of career management (Heneman, 1989) are:

- promoting of appropriate career development policies according to the type of activities developed and to individual and organizational needs and abilities;
- meeting organizational needs for development and enhancement of positive or favorable image of the organization by recognizing the staff training and development needs;
- integrating the individual needs and aspirations with organizational needs and goals;
- identifying and retaining the best employees or those with certain career prospects by meeting their short and long term professional needs and personal aspirations;
- elaborating career development plans or introducing special promotion schemes for skilled employees for whom there are no adequate jobs available;
- guiding and supporting competitive employees to achieve personal goals according to their potential, their needs and aspirations and their contribution within the organization;
- helping employees to identify skills and qualities needed for both current and future positions;
- providing the necessary employee training and development in order to enable them to meet any level of responsibility, provided they have the potential or capacity to achieve it;
- developing career pathways in order to guide individuals towards as many directions as possible;
- revitalizing the employees who show a certain stagnation or involution of their careers;
- obtaining mutual benefits both for the organization and its employees.

Changes in the educational field, reconsideration of the values and norms implicitly, put pressure on the alteration of the concept of career.

Because vertical movements have served before as external guides for gaining work experience and because hierarchies are being removed, people are now bound to rely on their own internal guidelines, such as development, learning, integration.

An individual's career orientation is important when related to his profession (Peeffer, 2010). Out of the compatibility of these two issues there result important consequences for the individual, for his behavior and attitudes at work, as well as for his state of balance and satisfaction.

It is essential that individuals carefully choose their profession; they have to think about what exactly it would imply on a long term, what are the specific activities, types of organizations, opportunities, possibilities to exploit their native potential; there may be a difference between the external perception of what that profession is like and what it really implies (Lefter et al., 2008).

Keeping track of a career means pursuing an employee’s past, present and predict his future path within the organization.

Career could be defined as an ascent of each individual, as a result of the
sequence of professional activities or professional positions, based on the attitudes, knowledge and skills acquired over time.

1. Initial training of didactic staff in Romanian higher education

Analyzing the theoretical concepts and the actual educational practices that can be identified in various educational systems in the world in terms of training future teachers, there can be observed similar elements. There is certainly a common point identifiable within all training concepts, regardless of the paradigm that underlies them, namely the necessity to combine the practical and theoretical training. The aspects that differentiate the training programs concern: the ratio between theoretical and practical training, the duration of the training program, national specific elements, educational and institutional policies.

The dimensions of professionalization that can be deducted out of this definition are:

- professionalization implies the description or elaboration of a “professional identity”, so as to outline a set of knowledge and skills structured in a "professional model" (professional standards), which can be assimilated systematically, on a scientific basis;
- professionalization also requires an appropriate effort to legitimize the teaching profession within the field of social activities and professions, with the help of this model of the teaching profession.

Professional standards, understood in the sense of certain quality and quantity criteria of teachers’ activity, used both to describe and assess the work of a teacher, to make an adequate selection of teaching staff in various situations, but also to improve initial and ongoing training programs for careers, are fundamental to attain these objectives.

A model of the teaching profession should include both standardizable skills (measurable, observable) and unstandardizable skills (having a high rate of subjectivity).

The quality of graduates is also generated by the quality of the training system and what it contributes with, capitalizes on and enhances from a personal perspective. Thus the selection process of potential future teachers becomes increasingly necessary.

Teacher training is officially recognized as part of higher education, equivalent to other academic specializations, having the ability to commit resources in order to achieve high-level scientific research.

This means that the training activities of teachers have to be raised to a higher level than they are today. An important step for this achievement is the reform of institutions responsible for organizing and conducting initial and ongoing training programs for teachers, respectively Teacher Training Departments (DPPD).

The approach to legitimize the teaching profession among social activities and professions is one of the essential dimensions of professionalizing the teaching career. In order to achieve this it is of paramount importance to develop a unified model of the teaching profession and the standards of the teaching profession.

In the opinion of Romanian specialists elaborating the standards, a professional standard has a complex structure, containing the following five elements:

- what activities are expected to be conducted by a teacher (specifying the types of activities required);
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• What are the features that these activities should have in order to be able to assess that the quality is achieved at a level accepted by the society (description of activity);
• motivating the need to perform these actions (the reason of their enforcement);
• What are the criteria used to assess the quality of work required (observable and measurable behaviors that highlight the achievement of the required activities, at the socially acceptable quality level);
• how the required activities will be assessed (evaluation forms used).

Among the advantages of standardization there are included: providing the quality of initial and ongoing training; teacher certification, career development opportunity, creating an effective mechanism for internal and external evaluation of the results as well as of the teaching process, rewarding teachers’ performance, cohesion between the various institutional segments involved in education. Moreover, among the difficulties related to the standardization process there can be emphasized: the tendency to generalize the functions of standards; the difficulty of determining the optimal point of the connection between what is constant and compulsory, on the one hand and dynamism and flexibility on the other hand; the difficulty of deriving the learning process characteristics, which depend on certain subtle and difficult to notice features (Buse, 2009).

Education specialists argue that after the development and subsequent use of the teaching profession standards, many positive effects are expected for the teaching staff and education in general:

• the creation of premises of granting equal opportunities to all children and young people in order to receive quality education from teachers trained according to exclusive professional standards;
• redefining the status of the teaching profession within the occupational system and on the labor market, by increasing the prestige and protection;
• reconsidering the content and form of initial and ongoing training of teachers, providing consistency throughout the system;
• the possibility to prepare a special category of teacher-evaluators, trained for assessing their colleagues’ activity, in order to help them improve professionally;
• reconsidering school inspections and the way of preparing the inspection committees;
• reconsidering the evaluation process for granting professional certification (full-time professional degree);
• reduce subjectivity and formalism in evaluating teachers’ activity;
• clearer definition of roles and responsibilities in the educational system, which will result in improving the educational system in general;
• increasing teamwork, professional cooperation, in order to achieve common goals for improvement;
• facilitate a better collaboration between university specialists and trainers of preuniversitary educational system;
• creating a common university-school training environment, an environment enabling professionalization.

The experience of other countries regarding professionalization prove to be positive, therefore it be used as source of inspiration in reorganizing and restructuring the teaching profession in Romania, but also in reforming teacher training strategies, so as to modernize and improve the quality of Romanian education.
Summarizing the information obtained by consulting various sources on the Internet, the experience of teaching profession standardization in Australia, USA, Great Britain, Canada, Belgium, Switzerland, Central and Eastern European countries and Romania demonstrates the functionality of standards focused on the purpose, on the product, namely on the development of teaching skills.

We conclude that they surpassed the traditional stage, that of education and training focusing on content, according to the analyzed standards, which explicitly mentions the skills, attitudes, abilities and aptitudes that graduates will acquire.

There is no educational system that valorizes only the teachers' specialized scientific training or their ability to transmit the subject matter content to the students; but there are always indicated a series of other skills needed to support learning activities and students' personality training at various times of the educational process.

Thus, the professionalization of teaching career becomes possible in our country as well, as long as it is creating a model of the teaching profession, and teacher training is based on professional standards designed for different specialties teachers, novice teachers, experienced educators etc., so that all the work of educators can be subjected to training, conducted and assessed in a professional manner.

The teaching skills of a teacher are considered to be representative for his entire educational activity. Some of these skills are stated by the teaching science and can be standardized so that one can specifically describe the activities required, the teacher's expected work performance and the criteria according to which his work will be evaluated. On the other hand, there are also non-standardizable skills, stated by the art of teaching, according to the educator's individual aptitudes which can not be quantified in measurable performance, but make the educational activity authentic and contextually appropriate.

Reviewing the typology and characteristics of teaching activities, different teaching strategies and styles stands for an argument in favor of the claim that teachers' professional activity is complex and can be successfully achieved in different ways, the "perfect" version being impossible to identify. Therefore, the training process of future teachers must emphasize the intellectual flexibility of the students, self-knowledge and especially the attitude of professional involvement, of concern for personal and professional development. A major role in this process is played by the trainers, namely teachers and mentors from universities and vocational schools. The model they offer, their teaching styles, attitudes and values they transmit the teaching skills developed, are sources of inspiration for students-future teachers. The quality of the trainers depends heavily on the quality of the training process and the quality of the graduates that is the teachers to be.

According to legal provisions in force and in light of the incoming compatibility of Romanian education with the European one, the psycho-pedagogical training program for the teaching profession ends with a final evaluation, based on a teaching portfolio, consisting of a set of documents that synthetically reflects the level and quality of the skills acquired by graduates by attending the psycho-pedagogical study program.

2. Career features of the Romanian educational system

Career is commonly understood as an upward or progress movement of a person within a certain field of activity, in order to earn more money, more responsibility and more power and personal prestige. Prestige and social status are
important factors motivating the choice of university teaching career, even if they occur later on during teachers’ lives.

Academic career continues to provide prestige and social recognition to those who choose it, but they no longer constitute sufficient grounds. For young university teachers nowadays they are more like a compensation for the years of financial difficulties that the system provides for debutants. Thus, with an average wage of 700 RON per month, young teachers barely afford to pay their rent and monthly bills.

However, their working hours reach up to 12 hours a day for teaching and research activity. This is because social status and prestige offered by academic career come too late, and require at least ten years of teaching, and especially research.

Behind every teaching hour with the students there are at least three hours of individual work. In addition, they also have to work on articles and scientific papers which are indispensable for career advancement opportunities.

The higher education staff consists of: teaching staff, research staff, auxiliary teaching personnel and administrative staff.

Higher education teaching staff consists of:

- junior teaching assistants,
- Assistant professors,
- lecturers,
- readers,
- professors,
- adviser professor,
- associate teaching staff.

According to the type of the teaching positions, whether for public or private higher education, are set by the Status of Teachers, Law no. 128/1997.

Candidates for a teaching position must demonstrate through a diploma issued by the Ministry of Education and Research that they graduated a specialization according to the structure of the teaching line of the job they are applying for. Teaching positions can be occupied only by Romanian citizens. As an exception, these positions can also be filled by foreign citizens, as associate teaching staff, with a limited period employment contract, under the law and actual Regulation.

The positions which the University can include to vacancy contest are: junior teaching assistant, lecturer, reader, professor. There can be proposed for vacancy contest only those positions that have a prospect of at least three years, consisting of activities belonging to the same area. The positions of professor and reader can enter the competition only if they imply courses of at least one compulsory subject and do not imply optional subjects.

Filling an immediately superior position is done according to the Law regarding the Status of Teachers. Seniority exemptions are given in accordance with the Charter of the University by the University Senate.

The vacancy contest proposals for junior teaching assistant, assistant and lecturer are made by the head of department and approved by the Faculty Council. The vacancy contest proposals for reader and professor are made by the head of department, supported by the Faculty Board and approved by a committee of the College of Senate composed of the rector, vice-rectors and Scientific Secretary of the Senate.

The decision to propose these teaching positions for vacancy contest will be made taking into account the opportunity criteria:
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- the need for that specific position’s existence in the job title list of the department and its contest occupancy;
- the structure of the department and faculty according to teaching positions;
- the financial status of the faculty;
- the prospects that the position can be filled by a person of high professional competence.

The University of Craiova is one of the institutions with long tradition of the higher education and research activity in Romania. Founded in the mid-twentieth century, by Law no. 138 of 25 April 1947, the University of Craiova has won a place of honor in the national university educational system and a distinct role within academic collaborative relationships with other universities in Europe.

The University of Craiova is today one of the largest, most complex and diversely structured universities in Romania, which is firmly and dynamically committed to education and performance, in consonance with the desiderata of the EU integration process.

The faculties and departments are the basic units of higher education institutions and express the characteristics of a university community consisting of teaching staff, research staff, students, and auxiliary teaching personnel, structured in departments and chairs.

![Figure 1. Evolution of positions for vacancy contest during University academic years 2005-2008](image)

In the academic year 2005/2006 there were proposed for vacancy contest a number of 128 positions, the distribution for each office being stated in the table above. Out of these, 72 positions were validated by the University Senate, and 46 were validated by the Senate and passed to C.N.A.T.D.C.U. for further validation. Out of the 46 positions C.N.A.T.D.C.U. did not validate the contest, therefore did not approve three professor titles and two reader titles.

Out of the total number of positions proposed for vacancy contest there were validated according to law a number of 123 positions, which is 96.09%.

In the academic year 2006/2007 there were 191 positions proposed for vacancy contest, the distribution for each office being stated in the table above. Out of these, for the 123 positions validated by the Senate there were 129 candidates, six of them being
rejected, one running for assistant professor and five for junior teaching assistant. 68 positions, 23 for professor and 45 for reader were validated by the Senate and passed on to C.N.A.T.D.C.U. for further validation. Out of the 68 positions C.N.A.T.D.C.U. did not validate the vacancy contest, consequently it did not approve five professor titles and eight reader titles.

Out of the total number of positions proposed for vacancy contest there were validated according to law a number of 178 positions, which is 93,19%.

In the academic year 2007/2008 there were 146 positions proposed for vacancy contest, the distribution for each office being stated in the table above. Out of these, for the 78 positions validated by the Senate, there were 82 candidates, five of them being rejected, two for lecturer, one for assistant professor and two for junior teaching assistant. 68 positions, 18 for professor and 50 for reader, were validated by the Senate and passed on to the C.N.A.T.D.C.U. for further validation. Out of the 68 positions C.N.A.T.D.C.U. did not validate the vacancy contest, therefore did not approve two professor titles and two reader titles.

Out of the total number of positions proposed for vacancy contest there were validated according to law a number of 142 positions, which is 97,26%.

Starting from one of the meanings of career, naming the facts of being perceived as an ascent within an organization, the results are:

Table 1. Evolution of positions for vacancy contest during University academic years 2000-2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching position</th>
<th>Total of employees</th>
<th>Date of promotion to the position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant/Lecturer</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It follows that out of a total of 214 teachers with the title of reader, employed at the University of Craiova on 01.10.2009, 7% have been filling this position for more than ten years, which raises a series of questions about why there were no changes in their teaching career.

Moreover, out of a total of 308 teachers with the title of lecturer that the University of Craiova employed on 01.10.2009, 10% have been filling this position for over ten years.

The question is whether the managerial culture of universities in general, through all its norms, values and behaviors that determine the specific nature of the behaviors and procedures approved by the managerial group and imposed to the employees as being fair, efficient and desirable, has incentive effects on all employees?

As Professor Andrei Marga (1996) put it, “the internal management of the university visibly determines the capacity to solve problems and, ultimately, the performance of a university”.

The reference values that university managers refer to when making decisions, or the norms and rules they adopt in order to complement or develop the legal framework to meet the objectives aimed at are like a hard core of the organizational culture, leading to the development and performance of an institution.
Unlike the Romanian higher education, the French higher education implies fewer teaching positions and the access to them is made differently. Therefore, if in Romania a person who obtains a university degree (professor, reader, lecturer, assistant professor or junior teaching assistant) is sure of his position by being hired at the university where he passed the vacancy contest on an indefinite period (except for the lecturer without a PhD title), in the French educational system obtaining the title is not equivalent to the permanent job.

In this case the French deal with the relationship between professors and readers, which was reached 35% professors and 65% readers in 2009, and the short-term goal is to reach 40% professors and 60% readers.

With the Romanian higher education, one of the elements providing quality is the weight of assistant professors and junior teaching assistants in the total number of positions.

Conclusions

The review of the paradigms underlying the possible ways to approach the training process for the teaching career has enabled us to identify the theoretical and practical meanings of the changes which the Romanian educators are currently living. The main problem with the teaching staff in Romania is the social status deficit, translated by the low level of remuneration, by the underestimation of the teaching profession and by the lack of attractiveness of the teaching career among the youths and not only.

A second major problem is the professionalization deficit. Currently, except for pre-school and primary educational systems, the status of the teaching profession is occupational not professional: for graduates of higher education being a teacher is just one among other possible occupations.

Informational deficit is the third major problem the teaching staff is faced with. Communication and participation deficit is the fourth main problem of the Romanian teaching staff, determined by the persistence of the "rational-bureaucratic" organization of the educational system preventing the transparency and fluidity of communication flows: information is transmitted mainly upward, decision mainly downward, and "lateral" and "diagonal" communication are discouraged. However, the bureaucratic centralism is repulsive by its very nature against consulting and participatory management styles.

As a result, decisions are taken at the top of the hierarchy and, even if they are natural, their application is formal or faces resistance regarding their implementation by those who have not participated to their establishment in any way. Communication and participation are also hindered by the lack of an infrastructure necessary for a modern and efficient communication and by financial difficulties.

Career analysis starts by dividing all the job positions into groups, the criterion being the kinship of occupations (for example, in the case of a television there are groups of editorial, production, technical, administrative, marketing stations etc.). Within each group there can be made descriptions in terms of skills, thus making a difference between the positions and creating a scale (for example, the higher education teaching staff: Junior teaching assistant – Assistant Professor - Lecturer - Reader - Professor).
Sometimes a group can be divided in smaller and more homogeneous groups – a breakdown useful especially when career development can be achieved not only upwards, but also by moving horizontally.

The information obtained in this way can be used for career planning and to determine the attributes and skills at each level.

Moreover, such an analysis can be used to develop salary structures according to different job groups.

Career analysis can not be done without job analysis, which is one of the most important activities of human resource management.

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