

## **MENTORING AS A TOOL FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates the role and potential of the mentoring program in making public service more attractive and strengthening human resources within public administration. The study begins from the premise that public institutions need to adapt to a continuously changing professional context, with increasing demands regarding employees' skills, efficiency, and innovation capacity.

The object of the research is mentoring, namely the structured support process based on knowledge, experience, and best practices transferred between experienced professionals and those at the beginning of their careers or in professional development. The analysis draws on both specialized studies and comparative data of best practices applied in various European public administrations. The methodology included a review of the specialized literature, the analysis of institutional documents, and-as far as possible-the consultation of practical experiences reported by administrations that have implemented mentoring programs.

The results of the research testify that mentoring is actually a critical tool for career development in public administration, offering continuous training, fast integration, and professional promotion to the staff, while this tool also proves to be fundamental for the staff's retention, diversification of profiles, reduction of gender or opportunities disparities.

Such conclusions highlight that mentoring not only serves as an individual support mechanism but also as an institutional strategy to strengthen human resources and enhance an organizational culture based on collaboration and mutual learning. Accordingly, the development and consolidation of mentoring programs within public administration emerge as a priority direction in modernizing and professionalizing public service.

**Keywords:** mentoring, public service, career development, efficiency, mutual learning, professionalization.

**JEL Classification:** J24

### **Introduction**

Mentoring has become a strategic tool for institutional and professional development in today's context, when public administrations are urged to become more efficient, transparent, and responsive to citizens' needs. Mentoring practices are increasingly being adopted and supported by administrations throughout Europe; therefore, mentoring has come to occupy the central role in policies aimed at the transformation and modernization of the public service.

It links generations, experiences, and professional backgrounds that not only facilitate the integration of young talented people into the public service but also contribute to the continuous development of public officials currently in service. Mentoring is a structured and voluntary relationship between an experienced public servant (the mentor) and a colleague who is at an early stage in their career or in professional transition (the mentee), based on trust, mutual support, and continued learning.

Mentoring meets a dual need: it makes public service more attractive for young professionals and career changers, while supporting those considering their career choice with valuable guidance. In this regard, public administration mobilizes its human capital to become an agent of change by drawing mentors from its ranks.

### **Research methodology**

The study entailed an analysis of the relevant specialized literature in the field-studies, reports, scientific articles, public debates-that was synthesized in such a way as to identify major aspects and challenges of using mentoring as a tool for career development within both the European context and the Republic of Moldova. Based on the identified major limitations and difficulties of existing mentoring practices, there was developed a conceptual framework aiming at capturing the different forms of impact that mentoring has on professional and personal development.

As empirical sources, statistical data and publicly available information have been used, originating from reports of educational and vocational training institutions in the Republic of Moldova, international organizations, and others.

### **Results and discussions**

Mentoring means a relationship for learning and development between the experienced individual and the person interested in further advancement within the chosen field. This relationship is deliberately established for the professional and personal growth of the mentee-through knowledge acquisition, skill development, and better understanding of the chosen area-the less experienced person guided and benefiting from this interaction.

Mentoring in itself is understood as helping someone, giving advice, and sharing knowledge. Above all, it is a human relationship based on voluntariness, trust, respect, and openness. It is neither tutoring-which involves the transmission of technical knowledge-nor coaching-which doesn't imply sharing personal experience. It is a form of support that enables the development of behavioral and professional competencies, as well as achieving individual goals.

Over time, the specialized literature has defined mentoring and its characteristics in many ways. The general approaches refer to mentoring as a relation between someone with more experience and another with less, for the purpose of helping the latter to learn and develop skills. On the other hand, specific approaches define mentoring as a process in which a more senior person of higher status, with notable achievements and prestige, is there to support, educate, guide, and advise in order to facilitate the intellectual and/or professional development of a novice.

Mentoring relationships are characterized by a set of defining features that highlight the complexity and value of this type of interaction. Their fundamental purpose is the development and support of the mentee in achieving their goals, a process carried out through a wide range of supportive practices. These often include interventions aimed at strengthening professional and career development, facilitating access to relevant role models, and providing psychological support. At the same time, mentoring relationships imply a personal and reciprocal dimension, grounded in trust, experience-sharing, and collaboration—features that give them a distinct character compared to other types of institutional or professional relationships.

The mentoring relationship is very different from other kinds of institutionalized relationships in organizations, such as the relationship between a superior and a hierarchical subordinate. The basic characteristic is that the parties entering into a mentoring agreement do not need to collaborate formally or be in a direct working relationship. Additionally, the interaction between the mentor and mentee is generally closer and deeper than formal organizational relations, since it is personalized, directed toward development, and individualized in nature. Such a relationship surpasses functional and hierarchical limits, enhancing trust, confidentiality, and a genuine exchange of knowledge and experience between individuals (Kram, 1983).

In the literature of the specialty, the relationship of mentoring is conceptualized as a particular type of organizational relationship, different from the traditional hierarchical connections between superior and subordinate. It does not need, unlike these, a formal frame of collaboration, nor direct contractual links between the subjects involved in the relationship. There are multiple studies underlining that the relationship between mentor and mentee takes place closer

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and deeper than any other institutional relationships due to this very reason of personalized support, knowledge transference, and professional development it engages. The peculiarity of its character derives also from the reciprocal and non-hierarchical character of the interaction itself, overcoming organizational and functional boundaries for the sake of trust, confidentiality, and authentic experiences to be shared. Ghidul mentorului, 2023 Mentoring is not only one more tool of career development but an exceptional relational framework that stimulates human capital growth and organizational cohesion.

Mentoring is a complex process of support and professional development that materializes in various forms, depending on the organizational context, pursued objectives, and structural particularities of the relationship between mentor and mentee. Several typologies of mentoring are mentioned in the specialized literature, and the most frequently applied refers to formal and informal mentoring, individual mentoring, team mentoring, peer mentoring, as well as modern variants such as e-mentoring. This categorization emphasizes the flexibility of mechanisms for mentoring to fit different organizational and individual needs and points out its relevance in the dynamics of learning and professional development processes.

The choice of mentoring type depends on the objectives pursued, the resources available, the institutional context, and participants' preferences. In real-life practice, these forms can be combined or adapted in various ways to effectively meet the learning and development needs of those taking part.

Mentoring in most EU member states' public services is fostered to become a valued component of the professional trajectory of the officials concerned. In this respect, professional evaluation should recognize involvement in such activities for the support and development of colleagues. Simultaneously, mentoring needs to be regarded as a means of career development, inasmuch as it promotes knowledge transfer and best practices, aids in integrating and professionally developing new staff, and helps to establish a work culture based on continuous learning and cooperation.

So, mentoring can become not only an important driver of career development but also a catalyst for institutional transformation if adopted in a proactive manner. In encouraging intergenerational and cross-professional exchanges, mentoring fosters the development of new ideas and practices, enhancing adaptability to new social, economic, and technological challenges facing public administration.

Public administrations support the effective implementation of mentoring programs through guides and resources developed at the national level, which provide a coherent framework for action, planning methods, working tools, and models of evaluation. These are purposed to ensure the consistency, quality, and long-term impact of mentoring programs for the career development of public officials.

A mentoring program that can really contribute to career development should be based on a set of clear and coherent principles. First of all, it needs to be based on the establishment of clear, well-defined, and measurable objectives, which will provide both the mentor and mentee with a tangible direction to head toward. It is likewise fundamental that the design of the program be oriented toward real needs, ensuring that the mentoring process meets the expectations and challenges of the professional activity being faced.

Quality in the intervention is assured through proper training for mentors and program coordinators; these will develop the skills necessary to support and advise the development of their colleagues. Finally, transparency and equity in the selection of participants increase trust in the process and ensure that all those who wish to benefit from this experience are guaranteed access.

Another key aspect is active and constant communication among all actors, which keeps the process dynamic and allows the overcoming of small problems that may arise in a timely manner.

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Finally, ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities allow for the continuous improvement of the program, making mentoring a sustainable tool for professional growth and career management.

European experience underlines the fact that mentoring offers valued support in all stages of one's professional development. For example, when a new position is taken up, the mentor's role is to promote integration into the organizational culture, providing advice and clear points of reference in adjustment to the demands of the work environment. Similarly, in the period preceding the public office, mentoring is equally useful for trainees in public authorities, serving to understand the operation of institutions and to set a realistic view of their future duties.

It also significantly contributes to the moments of professional change, such as changing positions, promotion, or career reorientation, by offering both support and clarity during the adaptation process. At the same time, a relation of trust and continuing dialogue helps in strengthening self-confidence and acquiring leadership skills through mentoring relationships. These are important for a successful career in public administration. Mentors, too, feel satisfied in this relationship because by sharing their experience, they also reinforce their sense of belonging and are able to actively contribute to organizational culture.

Clear visibility of the mentoring program is important; all interested individuals should easily understand it. Explicit differentiation between mentoring types-for new employees, for interns, for career development, etc.-should be made in order not to create confusion and also for directing resources appropriately.

The development of mentoring represents a major priority for increasing the attractiveness of public service, strengthening employee retention, and diversifying professional profiles within public administration. Through mentoring, employees benefit from personalized support in consolidating their skills, access to the experience and expertise of more seasoned colleagues, as well as guidance in identifying and leveraging advancement opportunities. This process facilitates professional career development, enhances visibility and confidence in one's own trajectory, and contributes to better integration into institutional networks. Moreover, mentoring is an essential means of promoting equal opportunities and professional equality, as it provides all employees, regardless of profile or experience, with access to resources and support for progress (Crocker and Harris, 2002).

Much more than a training tool, mentoring is above all the expression of an organizational culture based on solidarity, passing on knowledge, and mutual support. It makes a direct contribution to the modernization and humanization of public administration, to the promotion of equal opportunities, and to the strengthening of an inclusive public service in which every civil servant can grow and find their place. Another major advantage of mentoring is its self-regenerating character: more than 90% of those who have benefited from a positive mentoring experience later decide to become mentors themselves. In this way, between generations of professionals in public administration, a continuous cycle of learning, development, and support is created. At a time when administration is called upon to be closer to citizens and more attentive to the dynamics of societal change, mentoring represents, more than individual support, a collective strategy for transformation at the service of efficiency, diversity, and excellence in public service.

Mentoring is a learning process and thus an effective tool of competency development in administrative leadership. In fact, for mentoring to be truly effective, it cannot be separated from its inherent place in professional training and development. The role of mentoring in developing leaders within public administration needs to be analyzed within the context of continuous education, professional growth, and personal development.

In modern roles of leadership within public administration, leaders are supposed to support career-starting civil servants and those engaged in elaborate projects, as well as encourage them to

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take up training activities, professional growth, and personal improvement throughout their careers in the public sector.

Consequently, it is the responsibility of leaders in administration to inspire, motivate, and foster the development of their colleagues. Through active participation in professional training, institutional leadership, lifelong learning, and personal development, they recognize mentoring as an important strategy that reinforces the administrative capability of budding leaders.

Furthermore, with an appropriate form of mentoring, emerging civil servants are granted the opportunity for acquiring the competencies and means necessary to contribute optimally to the development and performance of public administration. Through its guiding and formative character, mentoring would allow knowledge and experience to be passed on, confidence and professional responsibility fostered, and continuity between generations of professionals created; it becomes a major component of career planning and development in the public sector. Ultimately, leaders have the obligation to ensure that every employee in public administration has the benefit of a mentoring relationship since this directly enhances organizational efficiency as would be seen from the discussion above by Kohn and O'Connell 2015.

Mentoring is considered a time-tested form of personal and professional development. A mentoring relationship is more holistic in approach to learning, creating a favorable environment for meaningful growth in leadership and personal development.

The leaders in public service have altered the manner of exercising leadership over the past years. This change reflects the new and complex environment in which public administration operates. More importantly, it indicates that a more holistic approach to leadership has been adopted, along with a culture that promotes openness, enabling staff in public administration to exercise critical thinking, suggest new ideas, and debate them in order to contribute towards organizational efficiency.

The development of the learning environment in public administration fosters professional and personal development through knowledge and experience, and this is increasingly considered an important goal. A supportive learning environment will certainly aid future leaders to adapt and stay responsive to internal and external changes, or to adopt and apply more transformational approaches to leadership. Transformational leadership requires a consideration for public service values and a quest for significant change at the level of individuals, groups, or systems. There is a learning process involved within this approach, whereby future leaders come to identify themselves with this approach to leadership.

Mentoring is a learning process and a tool with evidence for leadership development. In reality, to be effective, mentoring cannot be separated from its core function in professional growth. The issue of mentoring within the leadership development process must be considered within the context of enhancement of leadership, lifelong learning, professional development, and personal growth. It is the duty of the leaders to guide the mentees in performing arduous tasks and to motivate and support subordinates who embark on different educational, professional, and personal development activities throughout their service life in public (Guide, 2023). Therefore, leaders must stimulate, encourage, and support their subordinates. Through the active development of leadership, professional improvement, lifelong learning, and personal growth, leaders—as mentors—recognize that mentoring is an important learning process that builds the competency of future leaders. Furthermore, through this relationship, leaders ensure that future public administration managers develop appropriate competencies to enable organizational efficiency and performance. Mentoring represents an important part of transformational leadership in public administration. It is meant to underpin the full development of the potential of future leaders within the public institutions. At the same time, mentoring is a catalyst for career development because it enables the building up of knowledge, enhances leadership skills, and fosters the progressive taking over of responsibilities. In such a context, the young professionals enjoy continuous

guidance, constructive feedback, and models of good practices that would permit them to configure a coherent and sustainable professional route. The Mentoring relationships contribute to the transfer of knowledge, competencies, and best practices, and to the passing on of organizational values and culture. Such relationships would neither replace nor interfere with but complement and strengthen existing processes of continuous professional development. Besides, they would become an instrument for career development: support in career orientation, planning stages of progress, and identification of growth opportunities. In this sense, through mentoring, public officials will have clarity of their professional objectives and are stimulated to develop those skills necessary to access management positions, making a contribution to the modernization and increase in efficiency of public administration.

### **Conclusions**

Mentoring in public administration is increasingly perceived as a tool of professional development, allowing knowledge, experience, and best practices to be transferred between generations and across hierarchical levels. Stronger competencies and an organizational culture of continuous learning are facilitated by a clear definition of mentoring as an institutionalized process.

Mentorship for career development thus plays a dual role: it supports employees who are just starting their careers to help them be oriented and adapt to professional requirements; on the other hand, it stimulates the development of management and leadership skills for those already in advanced positions. In this case, a relationship of mutual benefits arises.

Mentoring further reinforces the principle of equal opportunities, since it provides equal access to resources, support, and opportunities for professional development. Well-designed mentoring programs can alleviate disparities based on gender, age, social status, or other reasons, facilitating a merit-based career supported by competence. Leadership and mentoring are inextricably linked because mentors can perform an inspirational leadership role that guides and empowers. Meanwhile, the process of mentoring itself becomes a training ground for future leaders developing competencies such as responsibility, effective communication, and strategic decision-making.

The role of mentoring as a career management tool within public administration reflects a strategic investment for the development of human resources within public institutions toward professionalization, improvement in institutional performance, and sustainability of development within the context of current social and economic changes.

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