

## PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF STATE OFFICERS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR \*

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Igor Vukonjanski<sup>1</sup>, Danijela Vasiljević<sup>2</sup>, Nikola Mitić<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Law, University of John Naisbitt, Belgrade, Serbia

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Pedagogy, University of Kragujevac, Užice, Serbia

**Abstract.** *One of the key problems faced by public policy makers in the area of public administration reform is the modernization and professionalisation of the public sector. This, above all, means creating a well-trained and efficient administration. In order to achieve these principles, it is necessary to provide, among other things, permanent professional development of public sector employees for the duration of their work. Bearing in mind the lack of a systematic and purposeful approach in addressing this issue, practice leads us to find a new, comprehensive and sustainable system of professional development of employees in the public sector. Modern andragogical approaches in this field, which give the primacy to the so-called „non-formal education“, as well as the established concept of "new public management", further stimulate the search for new approaches to permanent professional improvement of public sector employees, with optimal use of small budget funds allocated for this purpose.*

**Key words:** *professional development, civil servants, public sector*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management, in the context of new public management, aims to create a professional and well-trained public administration. First of all, this is achieved through the process of securing, designing, developing and directing human knowledge, skills that are necessary for carrying out tasks of public importance. In this paper we will show how the two key public sector management functions interweave, i.e. how the institutional and

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**Corresponding author:** Igor Vukonjanski

Faculty of Law, University of John Naisbitt, Bulevar umetnosti 29, 11070 Novi Beograd, Serbia

Phone: +381 11 214 54 64 • E-mail: [ivukonjanski@naisbitt.edu.rs](mailto:ivukonjanski@naisbitt.edu.rs)

\*Analysis of the situation in the field of public sector education improvement, the views and recommendations presented in this text are the result of many years of work on projects of national importance and specialist training at institutes and academies for public administration in Germany, the Czech Republic, Ireland, Austria, Italy and Sweden.

non-institutional knowledge of public sector employees, with the prerequisite for consistent application of the basic principles of “knowledge management”, are generated in a new, additional value.

In this respect, it is necessary to point out the importance of the following components:

1. **Knowledge identification** is a complex process that locates data on the skills, knowledge and competences available to employees in the public sector. First of all, it refers here to the forms of portable and explicit knowledge defined by regulations, and less to the form of basic knowledge.

2. **Knowledge acquirement** can be from existing resources available to the public sector or by „buying” knowledge from external sources (outsourcing). In this latter case special experts have specific importance for certain areas and good practice of the European administrative area.

3. **Knowledge development** means supporting individual skills and stimulating articulation of the so-called „Tacit knowledge” in order to create new knowledge. This is primarily achieved through the strengthening of the development of the so-called „knowledge incubator” system and the establishment of a „learning organization” system.

4. **The sharing and distribution of knowledge** is the main purpose of acquiring knowledge and implies an interactive process of administrative organization and employees with advanced knowledge and skills needed. Courses, seminars, workshops and discussion groups are now irreplaceable and make a qualitatively new level in comparison to classical methods of formal education, that is, formal knowledge distribution.

5. **The use of knowledge** must be defined by a clear managerial strategy in the public sector, so that all efforts to design knowledge transfer methods would not become futile. The use of knowledge is also a key motivating factor for public sector employees, who must have a clear and unequivocal idea of all the benefits that newly acquired knowledge brings to their personal, professional, or career plan.

6. **Knowledge storage** involves the structuring and continuous updating of knowledge within the public sector. Knowledge must be kept in the form of documents and expert systems in which the procedure for using all data is defined. This preserved knowledge not only makes the new institutional memory, but also increases the sense of the active factor of new learning among civil servants.

The term professional development should be seen as a superior term in relation to professional development. Professional development is a complex process that involves constant development of competences for better quality of work and improvement of business. It includes experience from initial level of education, period of internship, professional development, career development and career advancement (Grandić & Stipić, 2011).

After initial education, training can be individually and institutionally. Individual professional development should not be viewed in isolation. It is a form of self-fulfilling activity, which also appears as a condition and as a product of all other forms of improvement (Vasiljević, 2010, 16). The choice of content and method of training depends, inter alia, on the personal interests of the individual, his competence for a particular field and work experience. This is also influenced by social and economic conditions, as well as motives that can be cognitive or material.

In relation to the place, the forms of training can be external and internal. External forms are realized through group and collective forms in the form of lectures, seminars, congresses, conferences, symposia, and the like. Regardless of where this type of training

is organized, it can be outside or within an institution. Internal form is very suitable for professional development because it is realized in the institution itself, and therefore it is available to all interested (Vasilijević & Sudzilovski, 2016).

Given that the function of professional development aims to overcome the differences between the existing and the desired state of professional competence of public sector employees, professional development should be a permanent process in order to continuously raise the level of competence of the public sector. At the same time, it is also necessary to provide the appropriate legislative framework in this area, which refers to: procedures for determining and contents of the program of professional development; rules for the accreditation of professional development programs and rules for accreditation of entities – legal entities and individuals authorized to implement professional training programs for public sector employees.

In addition to establishing a new organizational culture, it is necessary to approach the creation of a learning culture, which is in direct relation to the global requirements of a knowledge-based economy and the enhancement of skills and skills. Let's mention here only a few international documents:

- 1) „Adult Learning: A Key to the Twenty-First Century“ (Fifth International Conference on Adult Education UNESCO Conference in Cooperation with International Partner, Hamburg 1997);
- 2) „Memorandum on lifelong learning, Commission of the European Communities“ (Brussels, 2000);
- 3) „Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments“ (Dakar Framework for Action, 2000);
- 4) „Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality“ (Communication from the Commission, 21.11.2001, EC DG for Education and Culture and DG for Employment and Social Affairs 2001);
- 5) „The Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training“ in Copenhagen, 2002;
- 6) „UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development“ (Resolution of the 65th General Meeting of the German Commission for UNESCO (DUK), Bonn 2005).

## 2. PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF EMPLOYEES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR FROM THE ASPECT OF NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

The new public management in operational terms implies the imposition of primarily economic values and techniques of the private sector public, with emphasis on cheapness and efficiency in the work of the public sector in the context of the redefinition of public administration functions. Since the beginning of the 1980s, it has largely relied on the ideology of neoliberalism (Ketelaar, 2007).

The definition of new public management has a more pragmatic approach, because it does not consider it from a philosophical perspective, but above all as a rational response to some of the pressures that governments today face in the organization of the public sector or public services. Consequently, public management is defined as strategic and tactical planning, guidance, coordination and control of public sector activities. The above activities are entrusted to public managers. Public management is characterized by the specificity of the personnel function, stricter conditions for staff recruitment, the

public budgeting process, a stable organization that protects the public rather than a private interest and a special system of personal accountability.

The doctrine of the new public management on the professional development of civil servants looks at the activity and process of meeting the educational needs of public sector employees. According to the contents, organization and objectives of professional development, this function is a diversified and multifunctional process. It can be formal and informal. Thus, in operational and practical terms, professional training of employees implies all formal and informal, as well as regular and extraordinary forms of training and additional education during the career of an employee (Bennis & Mische, 1996).

What managers in the public sector of the Republic of Serbia should bear in mind is that, regardless of the significant number of highly educated and qualified, the educational structure of public sector employees is still unfavorable. Almost 50% of employees in the public sector are on elementary educational level with secondary education, which calls into question the existence of adequate working and professional skills and competences. In the conditions of modern work and public sector operations, public managers demand high competence and adaptability of employees, which means that vocational training and education is at the center of transformation and transition to a new organizational culture based on technologies and high-productivity.

Thus, the function of professional development and education of public sector employees should:

- 1) respond to the needs of the public sector and employees for knowledge and skills;
- 2) increase the value of human capital and create basic support for the further development of the public sector;
- 3) enable individuals full professional participation and the ability to be active and competitive in their work;
- 4) increase the professional mobility and flexibility of employees and
- 5) support the individual development and self-fulfillment of employees.

Furthermore, the function of professional development and additional education of public sector employees fulfills their mission through the manifestation of career development and continuous learning. In relation to an individual, this feature allows you to support the personal development and ability of each employee; to earn more profits; to perform better jobs and to manage their career development. Also, the function of professional development and additional education of public sector employees must also correspond with the needs of the users of public sector services, that is, the needs of the citizens, the economy, or in a word – the wider and broader communities.

### 3. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

In order to achieve the maximum efficiency and effectiveness of the permanent professional development or lifelong learning function of public sector employees, it is necessary to use all the existing capacities that the public sector currently has or can use. On the other hand, it is long over due that in the process of realizing plans and programs of professional development of employees in the public sector, the basics of the doctrine of knowledge management are implemented. Knowledge management involves the use of available resources in order to create an environment in which information is available to individuals who adopt, share, and use them to develop their own knowledge. In such

an environment, individuals are encouraged to apply their knowledge to the benefit of the organization they work in. In order to achieve this, we first need to provide appropriate human resources as a source of knowledge through the planning, recruitment, selection and retention of existing quality staff. Then, we must create a system of values within the public sector that will promote knowledge as a key criterion of recruitment, promotion, evaluation and rewarding of public sector employees.

On the other hand, knowledge management contributes to the correspondence of explicit and tacit knowledge at the level of the individual, group, organization and between organizations. This means that it is a primary task to locate employees with a thorough knowledge relevant to the job and that such employees retain the corresponding benefits of the civil service in the public administration system.

Education of public sector employees is a partnership activity and a shared responsibility of various actors: states, public managers and employees, as well as scientific and research and educational institutions. Social partnership is a joint response of key partners to the challenges of socio-economic development and the needs of the public sector for knowledge and skills and a basic mechanism for the planning and development of vocational education and training of employees. In the basis of planning and development of human resources, education and training of employees is a tripartite agreement – Governments, public managers and employees. The expected effect is the establishment of a dynamic and sustainable system of institutions and programs for education and training of public sector employees based on the needs of the public sector and the real possibilities of each employee.

Modern theory and practice of knowledge management gives great attention to the concept of permanent professional training of employees. Therefore, activities in the area of professional development include:

- 1) analysis of training needs,
- 2) planning of general professional development,
- 3) creation of special programs of professional development according to the needs of certain public administration departments,
- 4) evaluation of realized activities,
- 5) reporting and
- 6) continuous and stable sources of funding for these activities.

Thus, by analyzing the training needs, the topics and the accompanying contents of future training are precisely identified. The content and methodological aspects of the planned trainings are further operationalized by planning and programming of professional development. Evaluation of the conducted trainings by employees provides valuable data, which provide feedback on the quality of the accomplished training and their impact on the daily work of employees. Finally, reporting on conducted trainings is a set of information in this field intended for all stakeholders and partners in this field. From the aspect of financing, it is necessary to provide stable financial sources both in the national budget and in the budgets of local self-government units.

#### 4. PAST PRACTICE IN THE KNOWLEDGE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

The basic function of knowledge management in the public sector of the Republic of Serbia is only partially used. First, the emphasis was on improving the professional qualifications of civil servants, and then reducing the generation gap between government

officials facing the „shift of generations“ and introducing new technologies in the work of state institutions. The first effects were achieved by improving the key competences, that is, the personal qualifications of civil servants, and this was achieved by short-term training aimed at improving work efficiency, flexibility, mobility of personnel and improvement of communication and personal skills. The partial introduction of knowledge management in the public sector is the result of a global project – Decentralization and Strengthening of Local Self-Government Project of the European Commission and Council of Europe IPA, in which the author of this paper also contributed. (2007). Normatively, the knowledge management mechanism in the public sector of the Republic of Serbia is partly regulated by the strategic documents on the professional development of civil servants (2004, 2011, and 2013). Operatively, knowledge management in the public sector of the Republic of Serbia included only the activities related to the realization of professional training of civil servants through:

- 1) general – horizontal professional development (all civil servants are involved, no matter what state institution they work for);
- 2) professional development in Links to European Integration – The second part of the activities for the realization of professional development consists of training of civil servants in connection with the process of European integration (within the competence of the Office for European Integration, and today the Ministries for European integration) and
- 3) especially professional training related to contents that are specific to a particular institution of public law (*Reform of state administration and strengthening of institutional capacities in the Republic of Serbia – second phase*, 2014).

In the state administration bodies, the knowledge management function or the functions of professional development is located in the organizational unit for human resources and is completely reduced to the function of human resources management. The complete performance of the knowledge management function was also lacking due to the fact that there are no existing or there are no up-to-date databases on the conducted trainings and the civil servants who passed this training. Finally, the effect of the transfer of knowledge and skills among civil servants was also lacking. The problem of professional development of employees is especially critical in local self-government units, and the actual situation in this area and the consequences of such situation are discussed in the documents: Training and capacity building in local self-government Training and capacity development in local self-government, based on the participation in project: „Support for strengthening Local Self-government capacities in the context of the European Integration process“ (2008), Comparative analysis of national training systems in local self-government, based on participation on the same project and Functional analysis in 15 local units which is result of the updated report that was published as part of the national IPA project (*Decentralization and Strengthening of Local Self-Government*, 2007).

The observed shortcomings identified the policy makers in the Republic of Serbia to supplement the issues of professional development of employees and knowledge in the public sector in several strategic documents and action plans. In the meantime, the Personnel Management Service, as an expert service of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, has adopted the *Program of General Continuing Professional Development of Civil Servants* (Zlatanović & Antonijević, 2011, 14-28), the *General Professional Development Program for Managers* and the *Program of General Professional Development of Advanced Skills, Training and Management of Personal Development of Employees*.

The program of general continuing professional development of civil servants is focused on: managing the public policy system, strengthening public administration in the service of citizens, managing legislative processes, improving public finances, managing human resources, combating corruption and protecting human rights and secrecy of data in proceedings before organs state administration. The program of professional development of managers in state administration bodies includes three programs: Program for civil servants in position, Training program for managers of internal organizational units and Training program for civil servants preparing for leadership positions. The program of general professional development of advanced skills, training and management of personal development of employees includes the training of lecturers and the *Personal Development Program of employees*. The details of these professional development programs were published on the website of the Personnel Management Service.

At the level of the strategic documents of the Republic of Serbia, the problem of professional development and knowledge management in the public sector has been processed in as many as three documents: *Strategy of the Public Administration Reform in the Republic of Serbia* (2014), *Action Plan of the Public Administration Reform Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2015-2017* (2015), *Strategy for professional development of civil servants* (2013) and *Strategy for professional development of employees in local self-government units* (2015). These documents of national importance were preceded by extensive research into the situation in this area. The most comprehensive survey was conducted in 2013. among 1349 senior civil servants in 47 institutions of human resources in 2013. within the *European Coordinating for Cohesion Project in the Public Sector of the Future* (COCOPS, 2016) .

In summary, in the area of professional development and knowledge management in the public sector of the Republic of Serbia, it is necessary to: establish continuity in the implementation of professional development; encouraging equality in exercising the right to vocational training; establishment of efficiency and sustainability of the system of professional development; establishment of standardization of the process within the system of professional development; efficient monitoring and improvement of the quality of all processes in the system of professional development and more appropriate use of budget funds intended for professional development of civil servants.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Given that the new system of professional development of civil servants aims to overcome the differences between the existing and the desired state of professional competence of civil servants, and that the professional development of civil servants should be a permanent process with a view to continuously raising the level of competence of public administration, we can expect that the knowledge management function in the public sector of the Republic of Serbia is finally fully realized. We can also expect that policy makers have accepted the idea of knowledge as a capital value that brings new value.

Furthermore, strategic documents in this area also guarantee stable sources of funding for activities in this area. Such funding will be sustainable, as it is anticipated that professional development will include both old and new civil servants. New civil servants will be allowed to integrate more easily into the field of public administration, and the remaining civil servants, along with the development of their careers, will accept new

development trends and acquire new skills and knowledge necessary for the work of modern public administration. Also, with the declarative introduction of continuous professional development, we can expect that the public administration of the Republic of Serbia will be one step closer to the core values of the European Administrative Space.

Finally, it encourages the idea of compulsory professional development of managers at all levels of leadership (lower, middle and highest level of management), as well as the continuous training of a certain number of civil servants for the role of lecturers, which will facilitate the transfer of knowledge, skills and competences among state officials.

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## **UNAPREĐENJE STRUČNOG USAVRŠAVANJA DRŽAVNIH SLUŽBENIKA I ZNAČAJ UPRAVLJANJA ZNANJEM U JAVNOM SEKTORU**

*Osnovna ideja autora ovog teksta bila je da se funkcija upravljanja znanjem u javnom sketoru Republike Srbije sagleda sa pozicija novog javnog menadžmenta. Analizom teorijskih pretpostavki, zatečenog stanja i planiranih aktivnosti u cilju unašređenja u ovoj oblasti, želelo se ukazati da je znanje vrednost koja stvara novu vrednost; da se u znanje mora investirati i da znanjem treba valjano upravljati. Sticanje znanja, unapređenje kompetencija i veština javnih službenika nužan su preduslov za osavremenjivanje javne uprave. Dobro obučeni javni službenici postaju garant kvalitetne javne uprave u službi građana. Time se postižu još dva cilja: stvaranje dobre, efikasne i jeftinije javne uprave, koja će svim građanima ponuditi punu pravnu predvidljivost i izvesnost u ostvarivanju njihovih prava.*

*Ključne reči: stručno usavršavanje, državni službenici, javni sektor*