

Measuring Politicization-Romanian Civil Service System

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Abstract

Through the case study of Romanian Civil Service System, the article analyzes how politicization can be measured. Romania is facing a complex reform in order to strengthen administrative capacity and the CSR is a core component of PAR. The monitoring project was premised on the need to check on CSR progresses in order to take corrective actions. The WB, through PAL, offered to assist Romanian Government to build a CSR monitoring system. Construction the monitoring system started with formulation of project objective: “measuring depoliticization of CS”. In order to translate of “depoliticization” to monitoring indicators we defined and analyzed politicization practices: unfair treatment; demotion; and reorganization. We concluded over a core set of monitoring indicators of CS management: Quarterly turnover rates for: (a) CS Body / (b) High CS / (c) Managerial CS / (d) Executing CS.

Country Context

The road to the European Union integration has been an integral part of and a driving force behind *Public Administration Reform* (PAR) in Romania. The Government of Romania has initiated a wide-ranging reform program with the objective of *strengthening public administration capacity*.

The Central Unit for Public Administration Reform (CUPAR) have continually been reviewing the Government’s PAR efforts, and have produced draft documents summarizing both what has been accomplished to date and remaining challenges.¹ The framework for the acceleration of Public Administration Reform identified four priorities:

1. *Civil Service Reform*: Adopt and implement a comprehensive strategy for the reform of the civil service that clarifies the institutional responsibilities for administrative reform.
2. *Policy Formulation Reform*: Adopt and implement a comprehensive strategy for the reform of the policy formulation process.

¹The framework for the acceleration of Public Administration Reform

3. *Decentralization*: Adopt and implement a comprehensive strategy for the management of the on-going process of decentralization and deconcentration.
4. *Public Information*: Improve the public information management in the Romanian Public Administration.

Reasoning to measure Civil Service Reform progresses

Through any management book² is stressed out the need to plan, check on progress, compare progress to the plan, and take corrective action if progress do not match the plan. The key things to be planed, implement, monitor and evaluate are: time (schedule), cost (budget), and performance (specification). As Civil Service Reform (CSR) was a central component of PAR, a monitoring system was needed to ensure that the Government continuously assesses whether its CSR efforts are yielding their intended impacts on CS management practices and on the quality of the civil service. The monitoring system was intended to assess the progresses through achievement of the Civil Service Reform mission of: *creation and development of professional, stable and impartial civil servants' body*.

As synthesized in the Accelerated Strategy for PAR, most of the Civil Service Reform proposed actions were complicated (hence, difficult to implement) and not very well specified (hence, difficult to assess satisfactory implementation). They are complicated in at least three senses:

- (i) they are multidimensional;
- (ii) they require actions by multiple agents (e.g. National Agency of Civil Servants (NACS), The Central Unit for Public Administration Reform (CUPAR), Ministry of Public Finances (MoPF), Local Governments (LGs), etc.); and
- (iii) they require a *series* of actions over an extended period of time.

They were poorly specified in the sense that they failed to:

- (i) clearly specify the complexities of the proposed action (all dimensions, responsible agents, detailed series of sub-actions required over time); and

² Meredith, J. R., Project Management a managerial approach, New York, John Wiley & Sons, 2000, p. 410-462

- (ii) (b) specify clear criteria by which satisfactory implementation of the proposed action could be unambiguously judged.

Given this substantial issues and the need to monitor and evaluate them, the World Bank proposed to Romanian Government a technical assistance (TA) program, under Programmatic Adjustment Loans (PAL). Programmatic Adjustment Loans are World Bank technical assistance programs for: public administration reforms, institutional building, legal and judiciary reforms, increase public policy formulation capacity, transparency etc. PAL is part of PIBL - Private and Public Sector Institution Building. Operating between August 2003-December 2006, Romanian PAL had 104 actions coordinated by 9 Ministries, and targeted reforms for both public and private sectors. As a specific request, the Romanian Prime-Minister asked that PAL to be seen as an instrument to support Romanian Government efforts toward integration to European Union.

PAL conditions on CSR were designed to enable Romanian Government and other interested parties, such as European Union, to continuously assessment on CSR progresses and to underline reform interventions impacts on the quality of the civil service. The judgment draw up during the evaluation process concerns the needs which have to be met by the government interventions, and the effects produced by them. To conclude on this there are many methods to monitor the public interventions, such as: logic models, priority evaluation, Delphi survey, SWOT, cost-benefit analysis, benchmarking, cost effectiveness analysis, multicriteria analysis etc. Aiming to the overall objective of CSR, the World Bank technical assistance referred to: *creation of a core set of civil service management monitoring indicators, and an action plan for developing a system for compiling and publicly disseminating quarterly and annual monitoring indicators on civil service management practices*

Formulating objectives of monitoring project

Establishing a performance process measurement begins with identification of a program's, basic objectives. What is the program intended to accomplish?

To answer this question, the construction of aggregate civil service reform indicators started from CSR mission. The overall mission of CSR was re-

formulated to be literally conforming to the legal provision of the Law No. 188/1999 on Civil Servants Statute, art. 120³:

CSR mission- initial formulation	CSR mission -reformulated accordingly with the legislation_ Law No. 188/ 1999
Develop a professional, politically neutral civil service, managed on the basis of merit, rather than political loyalty.	Creation and development of professional, stable and impartial civil service body.

Figure 1. The Mission of Civil Service Reform

To carry out a systematic assessment of CSR progresses requires the identification of democratic dimensions of civil service system. Each donor has his own preferences on democratic values, and after several rounds of discussions among Romanian Government representatives and the World Bank mission experts, it was agreed that four dimensions of civil service system required to be measured, as in the figure bellow:

Dimensions of a Democratic Civil Service System
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depoliticization • Professionalization • Civil Service Performance Evaluation • Fairness

Figure 2. Dimensions of a Democratic Civil Service System

Based on the four dimensions of a democratic civil service system, the *objectives* of CSR progresses monitoring system were settled down to:

1. measuring depoliticization of Civil Service system;
2. measuring professionalization of Civil Service system;
3. assessing evaluation process within the Civil Service system;

³ Other sources of information that helped to identify the program objectives have been:

- Legislation, ordinances and regulations: Public Administration Law, Civil Servants Statute;
- Strategic plans and programmatic documents: Government Program, Public Administration Reform Strategy/up-grated version;
- European Union Commission Reports on country progress to accessing process;
- International Organizations Reports;
- Discussion and meetings with different levels of government officials, service providers.

4. measuring fairness within the Civil Service system.

As the subject of this article is to analyze how politicization can be measured, from now on, this selective research will cover only the component related to first objective of monitoring program, related to politicization: *measuring depoliticization of Civil Service system.*

Formulating the objectives to be achieved is a key part of developing a performance monitoring system. Translating outcomes in indicators sounds like a relatively straightforward activity. But a number of issues can complicate the task.

Understanding “politicization” and “depoliticization”

In order to make sure the project will be successful and it will reveal important aspects, an in-depth analysis to understand the logical of phenomena and objectives was required. Getting from the program objective to the monitoring indicators was accomplished in a systematic way by using a working methodology that included brainstorming, affinity analysis, multivoting etc.

To break the sequence into pieces it was used the “what -how” tool. *What is depoliticization?* Is the wording sufficiently specific? When the chunk-down work started it came across that words need to be define in more depth, eventually with the help of experts. In order to measure *depoliticization* we needed to understand it. To make sure we have a common vocabulary, and the wording is sufficiently specific the monitoring team started with concluding over:

- *definition of politicization / depoliticization; and*
- *politicization techniques;*

Definition of politicization. *Politicization* is a characteristic of a system or a person that no longer performs accordingly with professional or ethical principles but is more concerned about the power, status, and politics in general. Consequently, the *politicization* of civil service system supposes that, within a public institution, the civil servants are hired and promoted on undemocratic principles. Hiring and firing is based on political sympathy, nepotism, group interests, rather than with matter of professional criteria.

Politicization techniques. After consultations in panels of experts and brainstorming around *politicization practices and techniques* it appears that in Romania we dealt with three categories of practices, all reflected by the inside or outside *dynamics* of civil servants’ body:

I. Selective unfair treatment;

II. Demotion; and

III. Restructuring.

By law, one of the direct results of political leadership change is the appointment of new general managers of public authorities (ministry, central agencies, deconcentrated bodies etc). If the CS system is politicized, when a new party takes over the power, we would face the tendency to get rid of those civil servants that sympathized with the former power and to replace them with newly power supporters. Usually managerial positions are the target of the hostile attitude of newly appointed general manager that wants to impose his political interests with disregard of professional values and principles.

A critical factor to observe and to benchmark the civil service *dynamics* is the period of time corresponding to *political leadership change*. A change in the Government is factor of a major leadership change. In addition, changes in the Minister (or equivalent leadership position: secretary of state, prefect, mayor etc.) of a particular Ministry, or other budget user, will be monitored in order to be able to analyze entity-specific turnover rate changes, as will changes in organizational structures (e.g., restructurings).

I. Selective unfair treatment. Under the new management, in order to promote its own devotees, unprincipled and selective treatment might be apply to political opponents, usually manifest by:

- intensification of controlling efforts targeted against a specific division headed by unwanted employees;
- ignoring or not launching any action to implement certain activities;
- unpredictable delays during administrative processes;
- selective memory and attention;
- cut off budgets for specific activities or divisions etc.

II. Demotion. When the law allows it, the *personnel demotion* is one of the tactics to disperse from undesirable persons holding managerial positions by simply rotating them. Demotion is the act of moving somebody to a lower position or rank, often as a punishment to not serving in power party interests or not complying with political commands.

A recent example in Romanian context is, when in August 2007, the Prime-Minister rotated five prefects to the position of deputy-prefects.

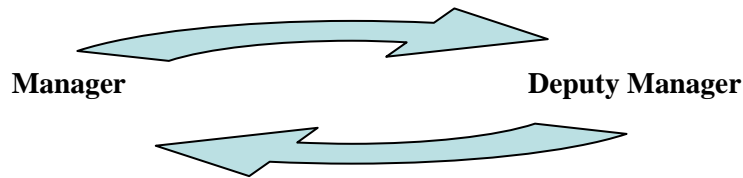


Figure 3. Personnel Demotion

This administrative decision was based on a light motivation: “benefit of good governance” and “bringing a plus of competency to the public institutions”. Behind these personnel swapping, otherwise permitted by law, the analysts and mass media indicated that the real rationale of these replacements is to take the transfer the managerial power from the PD devotees and transfer it to PNL devotees⁴.

III. Restructuring. When the law does not permit direct personnel demotion, and a specific political opponent needs to be eliminated, alternative and more ingenious methods are used: *modification of organizational diagram*. The re-architecture of the organization would be done in such manner to ensure the disappearance of a specific division / department and, consequently, the vanishing of the managerial position. To operate a modification of organizational diagram and take advantage by certain position disappearance we need to understand organizational structure.

For the purpose of our study, let’s assume we have a three layers organization with three layers: L.1, L. 2, L.3), as in the Figure 4.A. The organization has a general directorate on the first layer (L.1), two directorates on the second layer (L.2 A and L.2 B), and seven divisions on the third layer (L3A, L3B, ... L3G) as shown in the following structure:

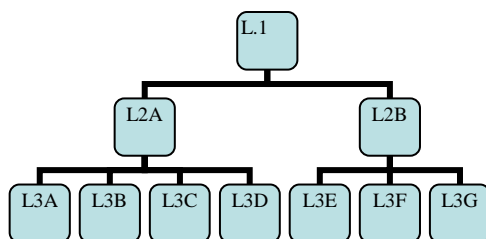
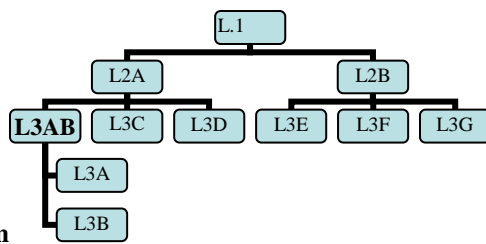


Figure 4A.: Modification of organizational diagram

⁴ The two parties Democrat Party and Liberal Party had formed an electoral alliance and further they formed the Government. After two years of political co-habitation, the Democrat Party left the Government and pass to the opposition. Political fights for power was reflected to all level of public structures, as presented.

Each of the above clusters has a manager. The usual tactic to get rid of an unwanted top manager is either by *merging divisions*. If the general manager wants to soak up the power of a specific person, namely head of division L.3B, the cleanest way of doing that is to improvise a new architecture of organizational structure. Reorganization consists by merging two or more division, one the fused structures should be L.3B. Let's say the strategic reorganization will result in merging of L.3A and L.3B into a single division L.3A.B. The newly resulted structure, shown in the figure 4B. would be naturally headed by a single manager, which won't be the politically undesired head of L.3B.

Figure 4 B: Modification of organizational diagram



An organization may encounter big or little modifications. But accordingly with Romanian legislation each and every organizational change has to be introduced through recommendations, reports and secondary legislation that would explain and fundament different rational basis. Even these modifications are made rather to fit political reasons than reform objectives, and they eventually came under criticism, it is difficult to objectively prove, measure or judge reorganization reasoning.

Translating “depoliticization” into indicators

Once the politicization path was explain, it remained the question if we can build the indicators to monitor theses processes? *How to measure depoliticization?* A monitoring indicator needs to asses the performances as a basis for appropriate corrective action if progresses do not match the plan. Since the indicators are part of the following acronym is helpful to ensure that we build a S-M-A-R-T⁵ indicators. If the specific circumstances do not allow having a: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time related indicator, the evaluator need to apply another monitoring and evaluation tool.

⁵ The acronym S-M-A-R-T comes from Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-related

The monitoring team was aware that selective *unfair treatments*, *demotions* and *restructuring* may occur when political leadership changes. But it was a unanimous agreement that is not possible to build monitoring indicators on these.

At this concluding stage, further team efforts focused on examining the consequences of politicization tactics. When a person is the subject of one or more described harassment technique, he/she is not left with too many options:

- either he/ she will stick to the job and resist to political harassment;
- or, he/ she will leave the job / CS Body.

If the employees feel that their power position is threatened inside the organization they will eventually leave the organization as the answer to unfair treatment, internal and external pressures. As we can not *objectively* measure *unfair treatments*, or judge *objectively* the rationale of *demotions* and *modification of organizational diagram*, the only objective measurement left is to count consequences of using politicization techniques reflected by leavings from CS Body.

As leaving of CS Body is the ultimate consequence of a politicized system, monitoring politicization / depoliticization should consist in to assessing the *turnover of civil servants*. Turnover of civil servants is total number of exits and entrances into the CS plus entrances and exits from the “reserve pool”; turnover reveals the rate of which employees leave the public agencies and would be replaced by others. Consequently, the core monitoring indicators of CS management practices and on the quality of the civil service is:

Quarterly turnover rates from CS Body

Figure 5: The core monitoring indicator to assess civil service politicization

Specifications for the turnover rates of civil servants.

Being aware that top managerial positions are more exposed to encounter pressure and hostile attitude when power changes, the monitoring team decided to collect and monitor distinct categories of turnover indicators, depending on civil servant rank. To establish the CS categories to monitor, an analysis of the institutional structure of a Romanian public organization was required.

Most of the local government structures are similar to one another, but each central institution created organization that best suits its particular needs. In respect of local autonomy principle, the Romanian law contains provisions regarding the horizontal and vertical differentiation of organizations and, naturally, each ministry, autonomous agencies, or local government had established its own regulations regarding the divisions, assignment of duties and the establishment of division and departments, taking into account their circumstances.

Still a typical public institution in Romania would have 7 organizational layers, including the politically appointees, from the top this is reflected in the box below:

Institutional function	Hierarchically correspondences	Appointment procedure	Structures under coordination
1. Minister	General manager	politically appointed	head of the ministry
2. Secretary of State	Deputy general manager	politically appointed	deputy head of the ministry
3. General Secretary	General manager High Civil Servant	competition	general manager
4. General Director	Senior Manager High Civil Servant	competition	head of a general directorate
5. Division Director	Deputy senior manager Civil Servant	competition	head of a directorate
6. Chief of Department	Junior manager Civil Servant	competition	head of a division
7. Office Staff	Executive staff	competition	

Figure 6. The average structure of a Romanian central authority

Analyzing the civil service ranking system, expert concluded over the need to monitor three distinct three categories of civil servants for:

- High Civil Servants;
- Managerial Civil Servants;
- Executing Civil Servants.

Ultimately, in the Romanian Government effort of heading to a more meritocratic, professional, depoliticized civil service, it was concluded to monitor:

Monitoring Politicization Indicators
(a)Quarterly turnover rates from CS Body

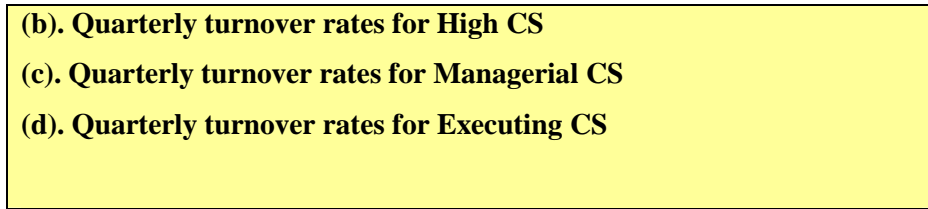


Figure. 7 The set of monitoring indicator to asses civil service politicization

Additional indicators' specifications referred that turnover rates would be net of deaths and retirements. And, by each of the three categories of CS, it was established that two distinct turnover indicators will be monitored:

- (i) exits and entrances into the CS;
- (ii) exits and entrances from the “reserve pool” .

Having in consideration the existing NACS capacity on electronic data collecting and processing, the monitoring team faced the situation of dealing with two categories of indicators:

- Currently monitorable- the data exist in the NACS data base;
- Monitorable with investment - the data do not exist in the NACS data base and need supplementary resources to be collected⁶.

Data Benchmarking

Data collection on CS turnover won't do the job of monitoring politicization, unless the results are benchmarked against something. Looking at data, some public agencies may claim to be done a good job in a worsening situation, and other will oppose it. Besides we want to measure general CSR progresses / regresses, not only a specific agency performance. How can answer the question: Where the truth lies? A clear view of government performances needs to compare with something; either with other government performances either with its regular *average*.

For benchmarking purpose of government performances, to select a comparator is rather an impossible task. Even with a very careful selection is unlikely to find a government that faces the same challenges, in similar circumstances such as country size, political context, socio-economical

⁶ As the NACS lack a performing informatics system, expertise and personal, not only data collection process, but also data processing and data distribution require supplementary resources allocations.

conditions, and cultural traditions. And in top of those similarities, the comparator partner maintains a data base that would allow benchmarking its performances with the ones of Romanian Government.

As the monitoring team considered improbable to look for such a benchmarking partner, they decided to benchmark the Romanian CSR progresses against themselves. For that purpose they assessed civil servants behavior. As any other employees, depending on the individual values and needs to development, time to time the civil servants reflects to their personal priorities. And they may decide to leave CS Body in the favor of a better paid job in the private sector. This dynamic created by personal reasoning would generate a normal turnover rate- *the average rate*. While the leavings resonated by unfair treatment, based upon political sympathy / hostility, reflect a political harassment.

Concluding that exits and entrances from CS Body depend on political cycle, to monitor politicization and evaluate its progresses requires a *series* of actions over an extended period of time:

- data collection over/ inside a political cycle (which will generate the *average turnover rate* of CS), and
- data collection when political leadership change.

As the Government mandate is 4 years, it results that a usual political cycle is 4 years, unless the Government is changed or restructured. This leads to conclusion that measuring politicization is a multi-years task of data collection and monitoring, as reflected in the graphic bellow:

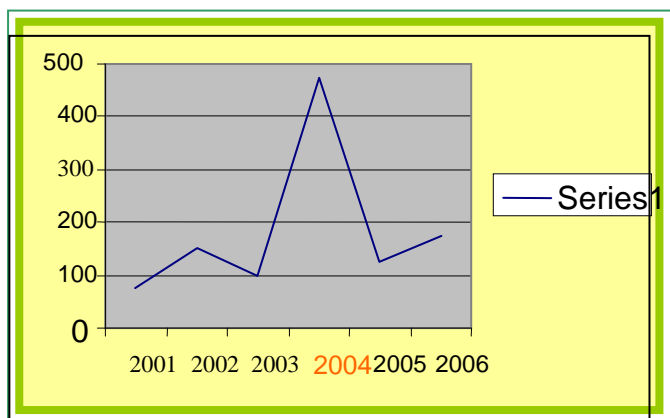


Figure 8. Spikes following changes in political leadership

If the graphic shows an average turnover rate of e.g. 15% in non-election period, but the turnover rate go up to e.g. 25% encountered within 6 months after

Government change, can we conclude that CS system is politicized? What if after elections the turnover rates go up to e.g. 50%?

Conclusions

The work on developing governance indicators has made us acutely aware of the many difficulties that arise in efforts to measure governance, and in using governance indicators to inform policy decisions. Once the monitoring indicators to measure politicization were established and their specification were detailed, the next sequence was to set-up a monitorable target for the CSR progresses. Taking in consideration all multidimensional factors, complexities of the proposed action, and detailed series of actions required over time, the evaluation team concluded that the target of the Civil Service Reform would be that:

Spikes following changes in political leadership decline over time. As causes of fluctuations in CS turnover rates may be multiple, it is required that changes in political leadership be carefully observed. Thus, while a target is to see declines in such spikes following changes in political leadership, it was recognized that those indicators will need to be analyzed in light of various factors.

After all, governance writ large is a concept that defies easy definition, and even some of the commonly⁷ accepted dimensions of governance, such as democratic accountability, government effectiveness, or rule of law, are themselves subject to definitional ambiguities. This is why it is important to keep in mind that all measures of governance performances will ultimately be imperfect proxies for the dimensions of governance one really wants to measure.

Acronyms

CSR Civil Service Reform

CUPAR - Central Unit for Public Administration Reform

⁷ Kaufman, D., Measuring Governance: Possibilities and Pitfalls, Issues paper for Roundtable on Measuring Governance hosted by the World Bank Institute, January 2007

LGs -Local Governments

MoPF - Ministry of Public Finances

NACS - National Agency of Civil Servants

PAL- Programmatic Adjustment Loans

PAR - Public Administration Reform

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