Ethical Values and the Human Resources Behaviour in Public Management

Armenia ANDRONICEANU[1]

Abstract: The role of ethical behaviour in public management is crucial for the public organizations' results and for the citizens' satisfaction. This idea is already demonstrated by several studies and the practitioners share it. There are limited knowledge about how the newly emerged politico-administrative dichotomy in the Balkans has influenced the formation of ethical behaviour along the management process and how this should be updated, taking into account that it is permanently influenced by regional cultures, by public managers and politicians. The main objectives of this paper are: (1) to identify some features of the human resources behaviour during the management process; (2) to underline the main reasons for unethical behaviour, (3) to identify some recommendations for creating and maintaining an ethically-oriented behaviour. The research methodology was based on questionnaire and included forty persons from the central government level. The paper concludes with some recommendations for improving the ethical behaviour of the human resources involved in the public management process at the central Romanian government.

Keywords: *ethics; human resources; public management*

JEL: *J21; J24; D23.*

Introduction

The research starts from the assumption that decisions and behaviours are influenced by values. People often have different values and ways of behaving. Although these different values make people behave differently, yet they should work together in organizations that have common values and ethical behaviour. A key role in this adaptation process have public managers. They have to set up the values and to follow them in the management process. It is necessary for the public managers to foster common value systems within their structures, if they want decisions and human behaviours to be consistent with their objectives. This consistency is possible if the organizations' values are known and agreed by every employee. It should be a sort of "soft" partnership based on ethical values. (Burlacu, 2011).

The word "ethics" is often in the news nowadays. Ethics is a philosophical term derived from the Greek word "ethos" meaning character or custom (Calciu,

---

[1] Professor PhD, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Faculty of Administration and Public Management, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: armenia.androniceanu@man.ase.ro

2009). This definition is linked with effective leadership in organizations. (Bovaird, Hughes, 1995).

Certain organizations will commit themselves to this philosophy through a formal pronouncement of a Code of Ethics or Standards of Conduct. Other private organizations, however, will be concerned with aspects of ethics of greater specificity, usefulness, and consistency. Formally defined, ethical behaviour is morally accepted as "good" and "right" as opposed to "bad" or "wrong" in a particular setting (Androniceanu, Abaluta, 2008). Organizations face a variety of changes and challenges that will have a profound impact on organizational dynamics and performance (Halachmi, 1995). A long-standing tradition of ethical behaviour is based on the principles of *honesty, integrity and trustworthiness.*

The ethical climate of an organization is composed by a set of beliefs about what correct behaviour is and how ethical issues will be handled. This climate sets the tone for decision making at all levels and in all circumstances (Androniceanu, 2011). Some of the factors and variables presented below were involved in the survey in order to emphasize the fact that ethical behaviour of the human resources is strongly influenced by ethical organizational environment which is based on ethical core values of each person involved in the management process. The main attributes included in the survey are the following: personal self-interest; public interest; operating efficiency; individual friendships; team interests; social responsibility; personal morality; rules and standards of procedure; laws and professional codes.

Standards for what constitutes ethical behaviour lie in a "grey area" where clear-cut right-versus-wrong answers may not always exist. As a result, unethical behaviour is sometimes imposed on public organizations by the formal environment (Popescu, R.I., 2008). However, ethical behaviour is in many cases strongly influenced by values in which public managers and the politicians believe. Their personal behaviour gives the others possibility to make a comparison between what the public managers and the politicians are saying about core ethical values of the public organization and how they apply these values in the management process. The research survey demonstrates that there are enough differences between these two dimensions. The differences are influences by several factors and variables. Identifying and knowing the content and the causes of these factors and variables may lead to the identification of ways to improve the ethical behaviour of human resources who are working in a public organization.

The effective management of ethical issues requires that public organizations ensure that their public managers, politicians and the civil servants know which are the ethical values - and how to deal with ethical issues in their everyday work (Moldoveanu, Sabie, 2009).

1. **Empirical survey on specific ethical values and ethical behaviour of public managers, civil servants and politicians**

It is now necessary for the Romanian public managers and for the politicians to reconsider their fundamental values and beliefs, to see which

represent now deviates from what we think we set out to be, and what we would like public employees to see us to be. Ethical behaviour is acknowledged as a necessity in modern governments.

There are some recent research studies conducted by different scholars. In the period 15-20 February 2006, one Romanian academic group working inside the International Research Centre for Public Management from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies initiated an empirical survey on the ethical behaviour in the Centre of the Romanian Government (CRG). We set up this survey having the main objectives to know what the people understand by ethical values and ethical behaviour and to identify the main reasons for unethical behaviour occurrence in the CRG. Based on this, we made some recommendations for improving ethical behaviour, taking into account the general principles for managing ethics in the public sector. The survey was replicated in 2012 and the current paper includes the main findings. The purpose of the survey was to identify the main changes of human resources ethical behaviour. The results have been used afterwards for making recommendation regarding the appropriate essential ethical values and the needed changes for the Romanian public administration and especially for the central government body.

The main dimensions of ethical behaviour considered and the meaning of each of them are the following:

➢ Utilitarian view of ethics — greatest good to the greatest number of people;

➢ Individualist view of ethics — primary commitment to one's long-term self-interests;

➢ Moral-rights view of ethics — respects and protects the fundamental rights of all people;

➢ Justice view of ethics — fair and impartial treatment of people according to legal rules and standards.

Forty persons from the CRG have answered to the questionnaire, conceived having in mind the identification of the ethical profile of the people at this level of the Romanian public administration. The sample consisted of 40 people including 32 men and 8 women. The structure by age group was: 23-30 years – 10%; 31-40 years – 20%; 41-50 years – 40%; over 50 years – 30%. Structure grouped by level of education and the last graduate school was the following: graduate studies - 85%, post graduate studies – 10% and meanwhile college studies - 5%. Regarding the experience in public administration it is notable that most participants (55%) have 15 years of experience in central public administration, followed by other 20% represented by people with an experience between 5 and 14 years. The rest of them (25%) have less than 4 years experience (between 1- 4 years).
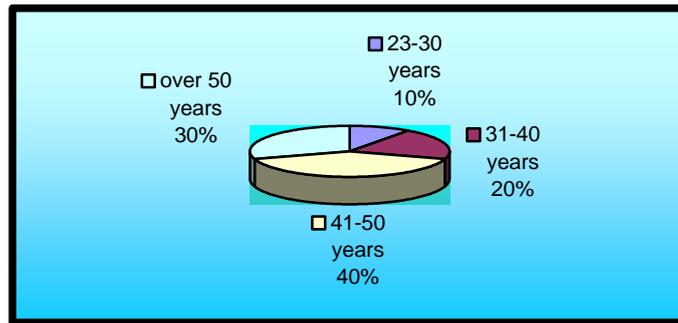
Figure 1. The sample structure by age

Figure 2 shows the group structure on both political and administrative levels while figure 3 details the structure of the political group composed by 10 persons including 6 executive directors and 4 counsellors or advisors of the ministers.
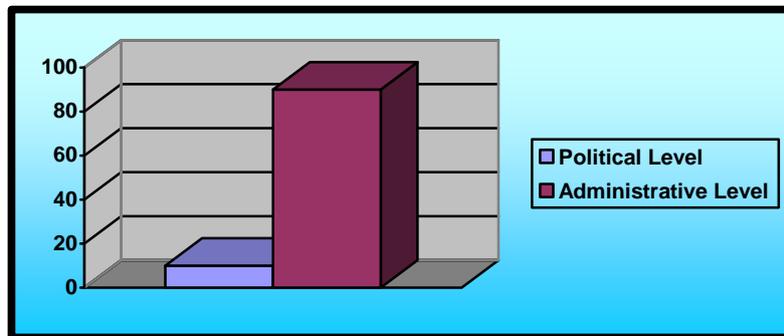

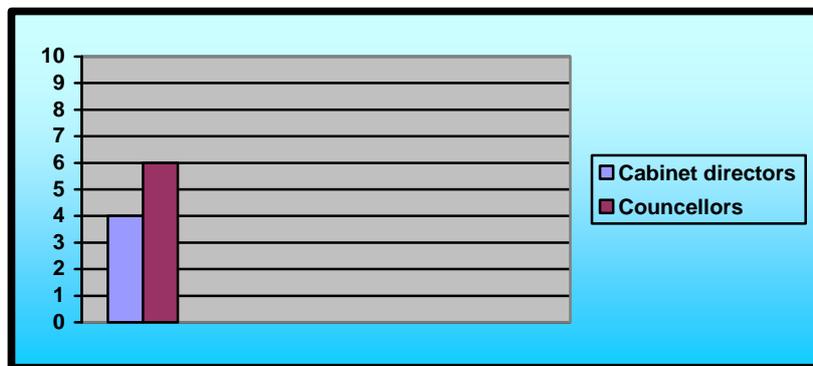**Figure 2. Sample structure on administrative and political levels**

Figure 3. The specific structure of the political level

Figure no. 4 presents the structure of the group from the administrative level: 30 persons -7 executive directors, 10 head of functional departments, 10 civil servants and 3 contracting people.
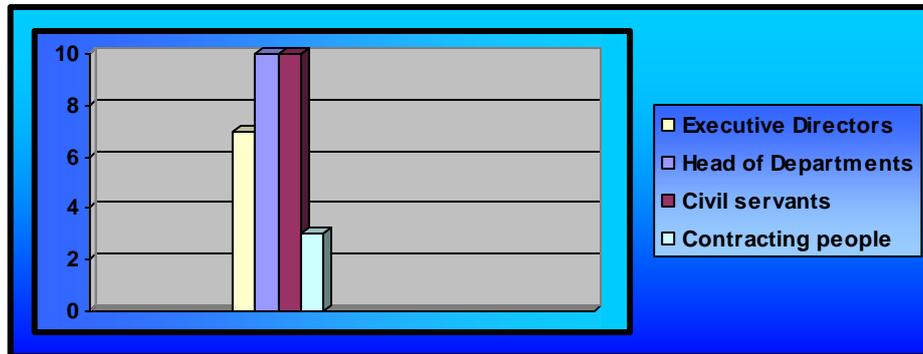

Figure 4. The structure of the administrative level

In our survey, we have considered the following three *categories of values* as influencing the ethical behaviour of the human resources:

a) Personal values – family influences, religious values, standards, and needs;

b) Government values – supervisory behaviour, peer group norms and behaviour, policy statements and written rules;

c) Environment values – government laws and regulations, societal norms and values.

It is found (see Figure 5) that most of the people from the administrative level which have been questioned feel a strong influence on their ethical behaviour coming from the last two categories of values. On the opposite part is the opinion of the people from the political level, who consider that their ethical behaviour is influenced by other factors and variables from the first category plus their political values.

The main *specific values* considered in our survey were: political self-interest; individual friendships; team interest; social responsibility; personal morality; rules and standards procedures; laws and professional codes. Concerning the understanding of ethical values and behaviour through our survey, we discovered that more then 80% of the investigated people do not know much about the ethical values and behaviour.

Figure 5 shows the extent to which each specific value influences the ethical behaviour of subjects during the management process: political self-interest – 30%; individual friendships – 15%; team interests – 5%; social responsibility – 5%; personal morality – 10%; rules and standard procedures – 30%; laws and professional codes – 5%.
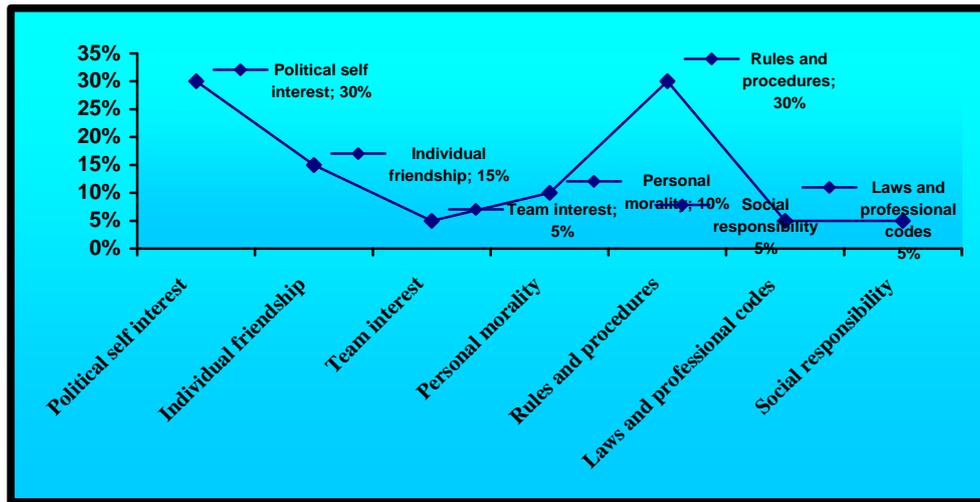
Figure 5. Values that influence ethical behaviour

More than 80% of the people involved in the survey mentioned that their ethical behaviour is strongly influenced by many other individual factors and variables: personal perceptions, own belief, education, rules, administrative procedures and their status in the central public administration (see figure 6). The remaining respondents believe that their behaviour is influenced by their position and status in the central government body.
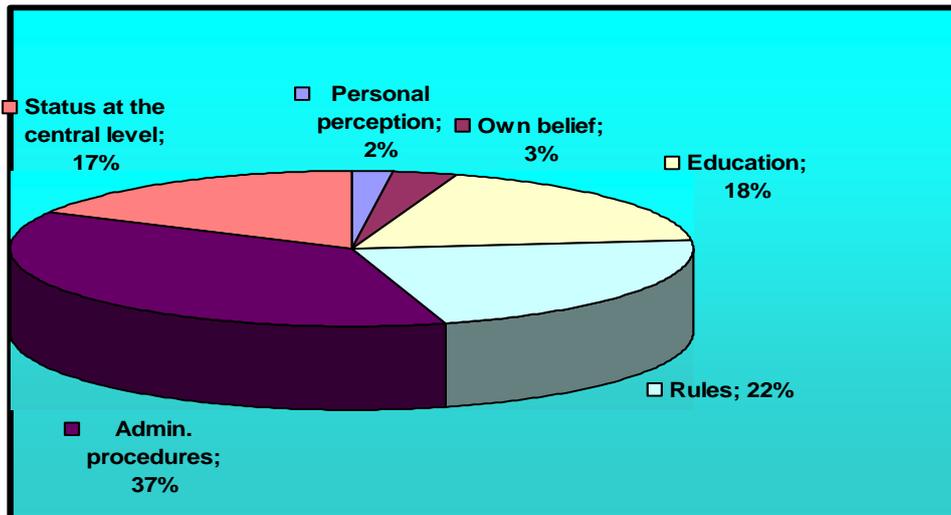

Figure 6. The main factors and variables that influence the behaviour of the human resources

All people from the political level considered the first and the second factors as the most important in influencing their ethical behaviour. The rest of the investigated people appreciated that their ethical values and the behaviour are strongly influenced by the administrative procedures, which had the highest rank followed by rules and education. Only 5% from the administrative level considered that their ethical behaviour is influenced by their personal perceptions and beliefs. As can be seen there is a strong difference between the political and the administrative level from the perspective of ethical values. Nobody refer to the clear system of ethical values for the people who are working at the level of the government. More than 90% of the investigated people declared that they know the ethical values and follow them in their daily activities because they understand how important are in their relations with others and for the image of the institution they are working for.

As demonstrated by our empirical research, people look at their leader and say, 'should I follow this person?' One very important attribute is Integrity. When the leader loses legitimacy, the entire basis of an effective body comes down – fairness, equality and long lasting values. The proper governmental culture will collapse, and that is something no public manager or politician can afford.

If one government is known to hold corrupt structures with bad image and non-ethical behaviour of their politicians and public managers, no one would like to co-operate with such government. In the longer run, citizens and the business environment do not want to be associated with such structures. Once a government or the public management representatives are regarded as corrupts, their level of legitimacy declines.

The corollary is that, in a system where one government subverts the law, it becomes much harder for other public organizations to operate "cleanly". This is why ethical behaviour and ethical leadership are a necessity. The experience proves the fact that is a real need for public managers and politicians to set up clear ethical values and build a sustainable and effective system of practices to implement them.

Following the results of our empirical study, credible leaders and politicians challenge the process by experimenting and taking risks in their work as a means to finding new and better ways of doing things. They inspire a shared vision among employees by envisioning the future and enlisting others to bring about that vision. They enable others to act by fostering collaboration and strengthening others.

Nearly half of public managers involved in research are credible leaders that encourage people by recognizing individual contributions and by celebrating their accomplishments. That means an ethical behaviour based on ethical values and morality. Most of the subjects considered that ethical behaviour is absolutely necessary when leaders attempt to implement reforms that are transformational in nature.

The survey pointed out that there are two categories of leadership competences related with public managers and with politicians: one category called

"soft skills" and the second called "strong/technical skills". It has been demonstrated that there are some critical leadership competencies confirmed as baseline for promoting ethical behaviour inside the centre of the government: understanding the policies of other departments; understanding the particularities of the ministries and their environment; building relationships and networks; managing change; managing the public; managing the relationship with the media; influencing, motivating, developing, retaining talent and creative human resources; managing conflict and dealing with problems of employees.

According to the survey results, most of the public managers are focused most of the time on their department activities only and therefore fail to identify the necessary links with other departments for the success of their work. The survey highlights the fact that leaders both civil servants and politicians need to fully understand how their departments: (1) fit into and support the larger government policy process and (2) enable their jurisdiction/agency to serve stakeholders.

We can conclude that the ethical behaviours and the performance expectations are strongly influenced by the leadership knowledge, skills, attitudes, and individual abilities. Most of the investigated people mentioned that there is a special internal code containing the main ethical values, but the problem is how to create an internal mechanism for meeting them along the management process. The code of ethics for the civil servants has been approved few years ago, but the effect is minimal. The public managers and the civil servants are much more motivated to follow the legal framework and the job description than to make an effort for integrate the ethical values in their daily activities. Most of them said that if their initiatives are legal, that means they are ethical too. Nobody explained them the difference between rules, legal framework and ethical values and how could be possible to integrate all of this in their daily ethical behaviour. The majority of our respondents pointed out the lack of an internal mechanism with ethical standards for public sector. They mentioned that respect ethical values remain at the discretion of each employee which should comply with internal and regulatory framework only. They know the obligations from the job descriptions, but most of these documents are very similar. So most of them have the same rights and obligations.

Concerning the political commitment for the ethical values it depends on the politicians, Cabinet Directors and also the personal counsellors of the ministers. Some of them, in a very empirically way, try to have an ethical behaviour, but not all the time. They are politicians and feel public institutions like a temporary placement of their political carrier. They are not very much interested to build a consistent and effective commitment of ethics to reinforce ethical conduct of people who are working in public institutions.

Related with the decision making process, the survey identified a poor consultation between the politicians and the public managers. Usually, the dialogue between the politicians, executive public managers and the civil servants at the centre of the government is very poor. Most of the time the people working on the

administrative level are very much involved in the implementation process of public policies not in the decision-making process. In this context the ethical values are not enough part of the politician working life. They consider these subject like secondary and because of that they are not interested for spending time in designing a functional mechanism for ethical values. Research has shown that people involved in the management process at the central government level have different opinions about the ethical values. The people from the administrative level are interested in having an ethical values system and they want to follow them together with the representatives from the political levels while politicians prefer not to have it. In conclusion, the people that were directly involved in management process at the CRG level do not have a unitary and coherent vision on these ethical values and behaviour. Based on the research results, in the next section of the paper were proposed several recommendations for increasing the ethical behaviour at the centre of the Romanian government.

2. Recommendations for increasing ethical behaviour at the centre of the Romanian government

One of the greatest challenges confronting any leader in this twenty first century is bridging the gap between strategy and getting people to execute. Leaders (politicians, executive public managers) direct people to focus on the right strategic issues. Too often people cannot identify with a government's strategy and likewise. Sometimes leaders are disconnected from the realities that people must face within the organization. If the leaders can properly bridge this gap (strategic vs. organizational capacity), then they should be able to create value.

The decision making process at the centre of the government should be based on a strong dialogue between leaders and their people. If the right people are engaged, then everyone should be able to cut their way through the strategic jungle. If leaders fail to engage people in strategic execution, then creating value through leadership will be exceedingly difficult. Although it is true that most people are not good strategic thinkers, it is also true that people want to contribute to a larger purpose that only the leader can convey. Therefore, communication is at the cornerstone of creating value through leadership. And given great communication, leaders from the centre of the government can close the gap between strategy and strategic execution.

Although governments have sometimes different cultural, political and administrative expectations, they often face similar ethical challenges, and the responses in their ethics management show common characteristics. The participants to the management process at the central government level need to have a point of reference in their approach. A consensus regarding the content of the ethical values is needed. Leaders, politicians and public managers should be open and flexible along the management process and to follow the same values, rules and regulations. In the next paragraphs are presented some recommendations for building an efficient system of ethical values in public institutions.

2.1. Training on the specific values concerning ethics and ethical behavior

The training programs should be designed to help participants to understand ethical aspects of their work, their status and also the ethical aspects of the decision making process inside the public institutions. It should help them to know how to incorporate high ethical standards in their daily organizational life. During the training program people should learn how to deal with ethical issues under legal and political pressure. Professional socialization should contribute to the development of them necessary judgment and skills enabling people to apply ethical principles in concrete circumstances. The participants should learn how to behave in order to get an impartial advice that can help the public managers and the politicians to create an environment in which people are more willing to confront and resolve ethical tensions and problems then to rise conflicts and dissatisfaction. Guidance and internal consultation mechanisms should be set up and explained in order to help the human resources to apply basic ethical standards in the workplace.

2.2. Setting up a special department in public institutions to monitor ethical values and behaviour

The name of this special team could be "moral quality circles" and can work at the centre of the Romanian government as an independent body based on the same principles like "management quality circles".

2.3. Designing and implementing a special ethical accounting mechanism in public organizations

The internal mechanism should be based on the following values:
• Respect for human dignity meaning to create culture that values employees, citizens, politicians; to produce safe public policies;
• Respect for basic rights meaning to protect rights of employees, public managers, citizens, and communities; to avoid anything that threatening safety, health, education, and living standards;
• Respect for good public leadership meaning: to support social interest; to work inside the government and institutions to support and protect the public interest.
Public leaders should be accountable for their actions to the public. Accountability should focus both on compliance with rules and ethical principles - and on the results achievement. Accountability mechanisms can be internal or can be provided by civil society. Mechanisms promoting accountability can be designed to provide adequate controls while allowing for appropriately flexible management.

The main steps for creating such mechanism are:

o Clarifying the vision and mission statement, setting goals and objectives;

o Presenting the principles and designing the core ethical values and the ethical standards at the workplace;

o Disseminating, motivating and communicating the ethical standards and values;

o Building teams oriented on ethical values and results;

o Measuring performance;

o Developing human resources;

o Increasing participative management;

o Preparing for transition to the new public management model based on ethical values and competitive leadership in public organizations.

2.4. Create a code of moral principles

That means to establish set standards of "good" and "bad" as opposed to "right" and "wrong". Public servants need to know what their rights and obligations are in terms of exposing actual or suspected wrong doing within the public service. These should include clear rules and procedures for politicians and executive public managers to follow - and a formal chain of responsibility. Civil servants and some of the politicians also should know their rights and obligations related to ethical values.

2.5. Create an ethical role model

Following the experiences from other developed countries, usually top public managers and the politicians serve as ethical role models. All public managers and politicians can influence the ethical behaviour of people who work for and with them. The practice rose that excessive pressure can foster unethical behaviour. Because of that, public managers should be realistic in setting performance goals for others (Ojo and Adebayo, 2012). They also must observe the ethical values through their daily life inside the public organizations. In this way they can become models for others around them.

2.6. Create a special codes of ethics for all people who are working for the centre of the government and also for other public organizations

That means a formal statement of the centre of the government and also an organization's values and ethical principles regarding how to behave in situations susceptible to the creation of ethical dilemmas. It should be reflected in the legal framework too. The Public Management Committee and the OECD Council recommended that the member countries have to take actions to ensure well-

functioning institutions and systems for promoting ethical conduct in the public service. This can be achieved by:

➢ developing and regularly reviewing policies, procedures, practices and institutions influencing ethical conduct in the public service;
➢ promoting government action to maintain high standards of conduct and counter corruption in the public sector;
➢ incorporating the ethical dimension into management frameworks to ensure that management practices are consistent with the values and principles of public service;
➢ combining judiciously those aspects of ethics management systems based on ideals with those based on the respect of rules;
➢ assessing the effects of public management reforms on public service ethical conduct;
➢ using as a reference the Principles for Managing Ethics in the Public Service to ensure high standards of ethical conduct.

The idea of this approach is to create a set of HR practices that work together to identify, develop, and promote talented people through the compliance with essential ethical values and leadership capacity.

Conclusions

As we can see in this paper, the absorption of the ethical values should happen in different ways, depending on the environment and the organizational culture and the particular characteristics of the human resources. A balance between political and administrative level should exist. This balance is generated by a system of ethical values and compliance mechanism in public institutions. An effective leader is one who makes a demonstrable impact on one or more of the ethical values presented in a positive way by influencing the behaviour and the performance of the others. In the *new era* of rapid changes and knowledge-based organizations, managerial work becomes increasingly a *leadership* task based on an ethical behaviour. Leadership is the primary force behind successful change, mainly because leaders empower human resources to act always by considering the permanent common set of ethical values.

References

1. **ANDRONICEANU, A.** (2011). Transparency of the Romanian local public administration. *Administration and Public Management Review*, No. 17, pp. 33-46.
2. **ANDRONICEANU, A. ABALUTA, O.** (2008). Leadership and Management in the Public Sector: Values, Standards and Competencies in Central and Eastern Europe, NispaCEE Printing House Bratislava, Slovakia, pp. 35-48.

3. **BOVAIRD, T., HUGHES R**. (1995). Re-engineering Public Sector Organizations: A Case Study of Radical Change in a British Local Authority. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*. 61: 355-372.

4. **BURLACU, S.** (2011). Le role des ONG pour la prise de conscience de l'importance des partenariats publics-prives dans l'economie sociale en Roumanie, *Administration and Public Management Review* no. 17, pp. 120-129.

5. **CALCIU, R.** (2009). The Ethics of the Civil Servants in the European Union. *Administration and Public Management Review, n*o.12, pp.174-182.

6. **HALACHMI, A.** (1995). Re-engineering and Public Management: Some Issues and Considerations. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*. 61(3) (September), pp.329-341.

7. **MOLDOVEANU, G. SABIE, O.** (2009). Leadership Vector of the Organizational Development. *Administration and Public Management Review* no. 12, pp. 110-119.

8. **OJO, B., ADEBAYO, M.** (2012). A factor analytic approach to users performance evaluation of the state land registry, *Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management*, Volume 7, Issue 4, November, pp. 72-82.

9. **POPESCU R.I.,** (2008). The European Policy Regarding the Improvement of the Urban Environment. *Administration and Public Management Review*, no.10, pp.142-150.