

The Training of New Public Administration Managers: A Radical Change in Content and Method¹

1. Premise: The Challenge of Economic and Industrial Transformation

Public Administration (PA) (and consequently those responsible for public functioning), has been passing through a crisis without precedents for some time now, in almost all advanced industrial countries. Together with the productive world which surrounds it and in which it operates, which is subject to rapid industrial economic changes, PA has remained attached and caught up in old ways of operating and managing.

The effects of these transformations on PA are not apparently visible, in the obvious form of the employment crisis for two reasons:

- because the mechanisms of the market economy which are dominant in the industry do not translate immediately the effect of innovations, and the notable increases in productivity in the productive sectors, into employment terms, and thus the need to readapt the work force is not so explicitly felt;
- because among the transformations in course there is the relatively more important growth, in the overall demand for the goods and services of the citizens, until now defined as "public", which has provoked an employment expansion without precedents in PA.

The first reason is explained considering the influence of many factors: first of all, the transformations underway in the industrial world are linked substantially to the evolution of physical and quantitative productivity, and thus are not the same as those of the PA world, which are linked instead to an operational efficiency not measurable in "quantitative" terms but rather in "qualitative" ones, which are assessed in completely different ways from those used to measure quantitative productivity in industry. As is known, the measurement of output in PA is still difficult to conceptualize, and the progress obtained in the methods used for measurement has not yet been transferred into PA in practical data collection like in industry.

Apart from the common capacity (on the part of industry and PA) to absorb innovation in information technology and telematics, which undoubtedly bring to PA noteworthy increases in "quantitative" productivity, the majority of the PA

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services (likewise for many private, educational, cultural and health services) are not susceptible to rapid and important changes in physical-quantitative productivity (service or output/man-hour), with the introduction of new machines, but only with improvements in quality. Neither in PA is there (unlike in the greater part of the industrial "private" world) the interest of the entrepreneur (who is urged on by competition) to translate technological innovation into an improvement in the combination of productive factors by eliminating obsolete and superfluous factors, such as not adequately requalified workforce. The demand for requalification therefore is much less felt in PA than in industry both for structural reasons and for labour market ones; but it would be wrong to deduce from this that the *needs for requalification* are less felt.

The second reason, that of the absolute increase in society's need and demand for public services is connected to the fact that, in contemporary industrial society, we are living with a certain saturation of the demand for tangible goods, and that the demand is expanding for "intangible" or cultural goods, which have been so far guaranteed by PA. This aspect, which has increased greatly society's needs for PA services, and which has led to an unbearable *overload* (exacerbated moreover the existence of a "democratic" regime, i.e. by a "vote market"), has placed the PA system (both from the financing and organisational point of view) in a crisis situation in which there is an objective need for transformation and transition: rather than increase its role of provider of services, it must increase its role in the "management", regulation, programming and encouragement of the substitution of the private sector for the public one, wherever possible:

- both in the commercial sector (where conditions for profitability exist for private entrepreneurs);
- and in the non-commercial, and nevertheless independent sector (non-profit voluntary cooperation) where there is the initial or permanent need for public support, but always in less burdensome terms than direct production.

These facts have meant that the needs for internal change in the PA, with regard to the "workforce", are linked (much more than in industry) to a requalification of the *management*, and *upper management*; and that it is necessary to introduce, rather than mere technological innovations (always to be hoped for and always possible, and which replace a *medium-low workforce*) of the *new criteria and new managerial and policy-oriented capacities*.

As already in industry, in PA the need has developed for a new specific *managerial professionalism*, independent from the specific competence of this or that branch of administration; a professionalism which is to a large extent (as in industry) *inter-changeable*, but which (much more than in industry) is capable of dealing with the plurality and complexity of criteria (or objective functions) by which any PA programme is governed.

As is known, industry today benefits from a vast range of training initiatives of a managerial type (management "masters" are rife today). On the other hand training for managers in PA is absolutely lacking, which whilst adopting the common spirit of manageriality are ready and prepared to deal with problems which are very different from those of the industrial world, and are characteristic

of the public functioning, and the typical needs for transformation of the role of this function in the "post-industrial" society of today.

2. The Emerging Demand for Managerial Qualifications in the Field of Public Management

The new vision and the emerging needs that are connected to it create a *demand for qualified work* in the complex sphere of the management of government agencies and organizations at any level, but which has not yet found an adequate supply.

Until now, managerial roles in this direction were carried out in a rather traditional way, or by means of the acquisition of *sectorial technical abilities*, or by means also of an *administrative conception of a prevalently juridical type*. Thus a typically managerial training *ad hoc* has been lacking.

But the reality of the breadth of activity assumed by operational public activities is pushing towards a more accentuated "*professionalization*" of the sector, with the creation of a new "*professional figure*" that is *sectorially workable*, as in the large private sectors.

Therefore, it is timely to begin to think of the creation of an educational activity that is oriented towards the preparation of a *new professionalism in the field of public administration*.

3. The Problems of the Formation of New Managers

This educational activity that is oriented towards the preparation of a new professionalism of *public management*, deserves, however, a period of reflection, study and experimentation for numerous reasons.

In the first place, these new needs are the result of developments that are *homogeneous in part*, on the scale of the various public management typologies in various countries, and *in part dissimilar*, according to legal, administrative and cultural systems, etc., that remain strong in different countries, as well as in the different countries of the European Union. These differences also concern the different stage of economic development of the different European regions, and all this hinders the reinforcement of a major social and economic cohesion, that the Union Treaty declares to pursue. A programme of educational activities, that is capable of *forming* new human energies in each country or of *readapting* old qualifications or work experiences that have become obsolete, needs a "trial" or "confrontation" period on a transnational scale, to progress towards a useful and efficient "minimum common denominator".

Moreover, a formative activity of such an innovative character, deserves to be begun with an eye to the higher and more qualified levels of these managers, who could subsequently be made promoters of further initiatives on more particular scales, of more defined typologies, and for more specific "national" and regional managements.

4. A Multinational Project for the Renewal of Management Training in Public Administration

This is why any initiative which starts from the level of any single country for a transformation of the current (or introduction of new) educational methods for PA managers, should start first from a common reflection on the renewal in training of PA managers. It is only on the basis of a common activity of teaching experimentation and study, that the identification of a curriculum of formation for *PA managers*, should develop, and which should correspond to the new need outline above.

The present text intends to give a contribution to the beginning of this study phase, of experimentation, and identification of the curriculum. The main objective of this writing is to formulate a post-university curriculum for the training of public managers, which makes use of real international, and above all European, experience, using criteria, methods and techniques defined on the scale of the best European experience, whilst being aware that the problems of adaptation of PA managers are very acute in the PA of nearly all advanced countries (as the the first results of the recent OECD project on "*Public Management*" and the studies and reforms suggested by the Report of the *Commission of Vice-President Gore* in the USA have suggested).

5. Some Informing Principles for a New Educational Planning of PA Management

The new training should be founded initially on some "informing principles, which we will briefly list:

5.1 Peculiarities

The principle of *peculiarity* concerns the fact that this training must be exclusively aimed at the *training* of the new professional figure of public administration manager, and nothing else.

5.2 Flexibility

The principle of *flexibility* concerns the fact that this training must be aimed at training a manager who can be used in *any* operational sector of PA, without distinction.

5.3 Post-scholasticism

The principle of *post-scholasticism* concerns the fact that this formation is assumed at the end of an ordinary advanced curriculum of studies, whether of a university sort or other.

5.4 Homogeneity

The principle of *homogeneity* concerns the fact that in comparison to its purpose (the capacity of the PA manager), such formation provides a *compact corpus of know-how without internal diversity*, apart from that which refers to the various academic bases of the participants.

From the said principles, some operational deductions can be drawn.

From the principle of peculiarity, it can be deduced that we must place ourselves in a position of indifference in comparison to the training origin of the participants, and to any professional direction alternative to that of PA manager. From this it follows also that the study programme must not be able to count on any basic propedeutic training in a specific way to the one imparted, unless that which is common to all the accesses to higher education.

At the most, as will be better explained later, in parallel with the main and unitary training anticipated in the programme, complementary courses of a university type can be imagined (already circumscribed as will be seen as instrumental to the main course) which the participants will be able to choose *ad libitum* in relation to their personal study origin and the gaps felt concerning unstudied subjects. These complementary courses as well must be constructed on the basis of conventional disciplines, but also in the essential form that could be useful as a background that is common to all participants without distinction.

From the principle of *flexibility* it is deduced that the Course will have substantially to leave aside the operational destinations in which the participants may find themselves operating. And thus it becomes indifferent whether the programme is built on the basis of consultations about needs that single administrations may express or manifest. If it is considered that a "practical" element is necessary for the definition of the programme, and for this the expertise and skills of the teachers are not sufficient, there may be included persons with managerial "experience" in the groups of educational planning, but the idea (that is contradictory to the principle of flexibility) is to be avoided of consulting representatives from single administrations.

From the principle of *post-scholasticism* it is deduced that the educational programme will leave aside the various professionalities that may be exercised within the various public administrations, and adds - perhaps to these professions, that are more or less well represented - an absolutely new and inexistent quid in these professions: manageriality.

From the principle of *homogeneity*, it is deduced that a programme must be judged by its internal coherence and consequentiality, in relation to the peculiar manageriality sought, and not by the presence of this or that discipline which may be considered necessary and/or opportune in the formation of the new manager.

As seen, such principles are strongly "interconnected". Far from manifesting the minimum logical contradictoriness, between themselves, they manifest a strong character of inter-dependency.

It is on the basis of these principles that the articulation of an educational programme of the type following has been conceived. It is possible however that despite the intentions, some parts of the programme may not live up to these principles.

6. The Fields of the Educational Programme

The selection of the fields of the educational programme in question will be governed by two guidelines, which may be considered two faces of the same need:

- 1) the professional destination of the new manager, thus his "*professional figure*";
- 2) the general and unique function to which he must respond: *decision management* (from the technical point of view).

With regard to the latter, it would be opportune to point out that by "decision management", reference is not only made to "decision-taking", with the relative techniques, but also to the capacity to "manage" them or implement them, with the relative techniques; and, furthermore, reference is made to the fact that the final decision is that of the political decision-maker (which falls outside the object of the professionalism of the educational programme); but that this is irrelevant for the teaching contents, which remain the same, and will be utilized by the manager or as support to political decision making (for which he is responsible) or for those decisions which he assumes as manager delegated (explicitly or implicitly) by the political decision-maker.

With the specification and connected limitation of field suggested - the managerial capacity of the participant - the educational programme can be divided into two fundamental parts:

1. the first relative to the functioning of the public system in its institutional, economic and sociological aspects;
2. the second relative to operationality of the public system, in its technical aspects of planning, evaluation, and decisions.

In the *first part* are illustrated and discussed the contents relative to the *functioning of the public system*, in such a way as to set the managerial problems of the second part in a suitable informative and cognitive general framework.

The second part, which is of an essentially technical nature, develops the managerial abilities proper of the participants and directly deals with a) the problems of management of the public system in its general characteristics, and b) the most important methods and techniques connected to managerial capacity.

With regard to the learning contents for each part, the scheme adopted by the OECD is proposed as a basis for the articulation of the activities of the Public Management Service (Puma)². It has the advantage a) of being the result of multinational consolidated experience (the common denominator of the recognized needs for improvement of public management in all Western countries), and b) of having available a certain quantity of study documents to be used for the teaching purposes of the programme.

²See on this subject the "Brief Information Note on the Activities in Progress at the Public Management Service of the OECD, etc." prepared by the author for colleagues at the "Scuola superiore di Pubblica Amministrazione" (12 May 1996).¹

7. First Part: The Educational Programme on the Functioning of the Public System

The functioning of the Public System will be dealt with in the Course in its aspects of a) *institutional functioning*; b) *economic functioning*; c) *sociopsychological functioning*.

7a. Institutional Functioning

From the angle of institutional functioning, the public system will be illustrated and discussed in the Programme in essential constitutional aspects:

- Birth and development of the public constitutions
- Various forms of public organisation
- Relations between law and public organisation and law and private organisation
- "Intermediate" forms of law and organisation between the public and private system.

7b. Economic Functioning

From the point of view of economic functioning, the public system will be illustrated and discussed in the programme in its aspects of relations and interdependency with the general social system:

- the public economy in the circuit of the general economic process
- the historical development of the public economy
- the financial organisation of the public system and its inter-connections with the other "sub-systems" of the general economic system (families, companies, non-profit organisations, etc.)
- the structural evolution of public spending
- the modern classification of public goods
- the various forms of financing of the public system
- the public budget and its essential structures and articulations
- the "theory of economic policy" and economic planning.

7c. Socio-cultural Functioning

From the socio-cultural point of view the public system is illustrated with reference to the behavioural aspects and problems both of the *citizen/user* of the system, and of the *operator/manager* of the system itself. Therefore in the following aspects:

- Culture and psychology of the citizen/user; modalities of stimulation to participation; to cooperation; to co-management; to the awareness of legitimacy and the public interest
- Culture and psychology of the operator/manager: perception of the collective interest and of personal interest; stimulation to awareness of the legitimacy and public interest and the public

Conditions for the development of a deontology of the public service.

In forms common both to the report of the public system with its citizens and users and with the operator-dependents, the psycho-social problems of control, regulation, obligations, etc. will be discussed for various categories of citizens and for various categories of functionaries of public power.

8. Second Part: the Educational Programme on the Operability of the Public System

In the second part concerning operability and its techniques, we propose - as said - to adopt the schematism of innovative aspects assumed by the OECD "Puma" service.

The managerial subject is divided into the following five fields:

- Decision-taking management
- Human resources management
- Management and reform of the regulatory system
- Management of the budget and financial management
- Management of performance and results.

8a. Decision-making Management

Decision-making management is certainly the most complex and delicate field in the entire *managerial capacity* (the fundamental and unitary object of the entire Programme). It is applied at various levels and contents, to the point that it is difficult to see it in an overall whole, also from the mere point of view of the decision-making techniques. Nevertheless it is good that its peculiarity is well marked transversally, because it is also the field that has been most neglected in the training of the public operator, perhaps exactly because of its variety.

Despite this variety, decision-making management may be dealt with from two essential angles: that of *coherence and compatibility* (of decisions) and that of the *efficacy* of the same.