

PERSONNEL TRAINING - ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN TRANSMISSION AND DISTRIBUTION OF ELECTRIC POWER SUBSIDIARIES

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SUMMARY

The power sector in Romania is currently passing through the first stage of its restructuring process. Important decisions are to be taken, great changes are to be made. The paper emphasises the importance of human resources management and personnel training in developing new relationships and skills for the people working in the system, in order to enable the new institutions to function properly. It also presents the particular experience of a local branch of the National Power Distribution Company.

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT – KEY FACTOR IN THE RESTRUCTURING PROCESS OF THE POWER SECTOR IN ROMANIA.

Human resources management has become a major concern for the leaders of economical units. Organisations do admit the necessity of enlisting and preserving highly qualified personnel as an essential provision for their progress and development. A company may have the most up-to-date equipment and the most advanced technologies – but its efficiency would suffer unless it also has the right people to do the right work.

Employment in the power field requires highly educated and trained personnel at all levels. Therefore, a great emphasis is laid by CONEL (National Power Company of Romania) on the selection, preparation and education of its staff.

Professional qualifications and the systematic training and briefing of CONEL's personnel can be acquired in specific courses launched for higher and middle managers and for employees in several technical fields of activity, foreign languages included.

Attention is also attached to individual improvement of employees' skills within CONEL's Vocational Training Center and within training courses organized by various entities in the country and abroad [1].

The main target of CONEL strategy in the field of Human Resources consists in optimising the personnel figure - motivated people, with adequate training and awareness of belonging to a strong company, ready to offer a modern, high-qualified public service to all the categories of customers [2].

Fulfilling this task means achieving the required levels of quality and quantity for the labour force, according to the complexity level of equipment and installations.

Raising the human resources efficiency in Transmission and Distribution of Electric Power Subsidiaries implies a highly professional personnel selection and training. The personnel policy of CONEL has to be linked to the reorganisation policy and to follow the laws of market economy: private investments, decentralisation, efficient management, unsubsidised prices. The difficulty in accomplishing these targets consists in the existing contradictions between the two cultures: the first one, democratic, defining the market economy – and the second one, autocratic, typical for a centralised economy.

The need to reorganise the power sector in Romania has been induced by many factors, including the commitments arising from the European agreements signed by Romania (stipulating the shift to a free energy market), the program of the Government and the state of the power sector itself, marked by low efficiency, outdated and worn-out technological heritage. Increasing this efficiency together with meeting the needs of heat and electric power consumers are the main goals of the reorganisation; the solutions for accomplishing them consist in privatisation, decentralisation and competition.

The reorganisation process consists in a shift from the former centralised, monopolistic structure, to a new, decentralised one, with independent producers and consumers, and is based on the following main principles:

- The separation of basic activities in the sector (generation, transmission, distribution and supply);
- Competition in generation and supply, as a result of the emergence of more companies for each activity – area;
- The right of large consumers (contestable) to buy power directly from the generators;
- The right of a non-discriminatory access to the transmission and distribution grids for generation companies, distribution companies, and also for contestable consumers;
- To create wholesale power market and a power exchange.

The restructuring process of the Romanian power sector comprises three stages [3]. The first stage, currently developing, has almost entirely materialised the actions aimed at creating the National Power Company (CONEL), the National Nuclear Company, the National Administration for Heavy Water and several other companies for support activities. As a result of the above mentioned actions, the structure of the power sector in Romania after accomplishing the first restructuring stage is illustrated in Figure 1:

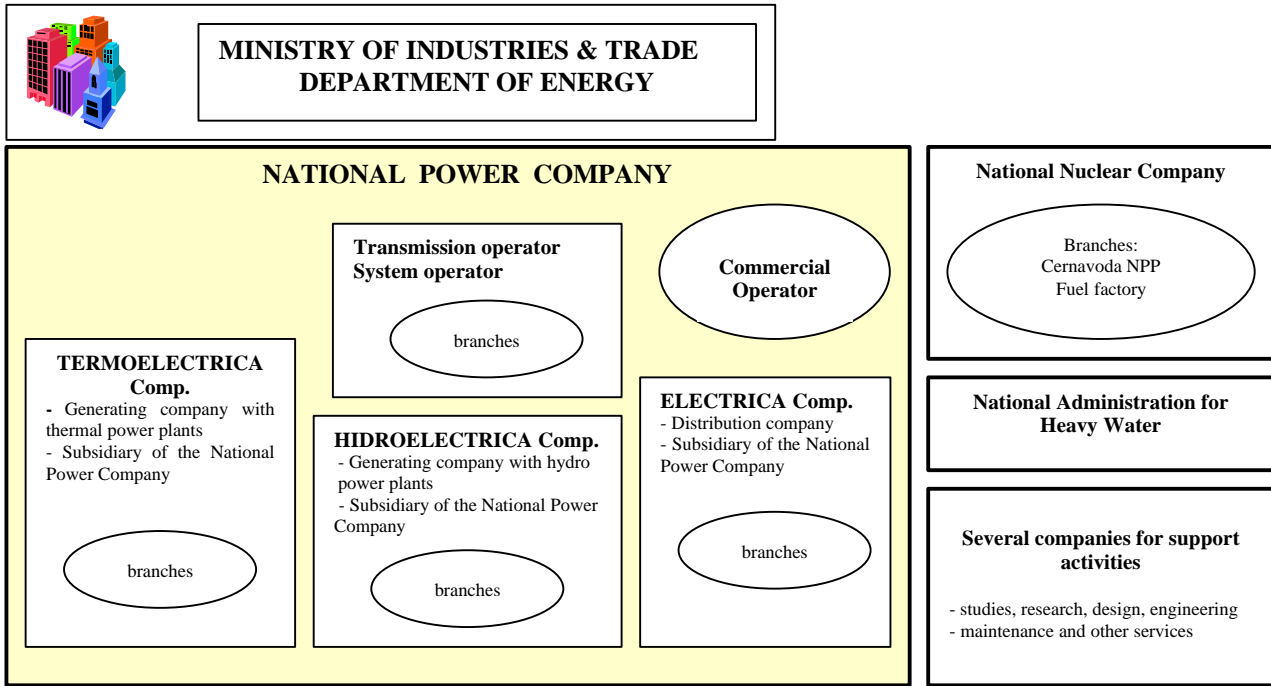


Figure 1: Romanian electricity sector structure after the first restructuring stage

The second stage will start when the structure presented in Fig.1 will be accomplished and will last at least 12 months. The purpose of this stage is to create a structure able to allow competition in power generation. The most important requirements to be fulfilled in this stage are the adoption of the Electric Power Act, the constitution of the Regulatory Authority and the start of its activity.

Finally, the third stage is going to develop a real power market, a purpose for which two most important actions have to be carried on:

- The separation from the National Power Company of the generation subsidiaries disposing of small hydro and thermal plants and the creation of independent commercial companies, which should be privatised afterwards;
- The separation from the National Power Company of the distribution subsidiaries, which should also be privatised in the future.

Implementation of the proposed restructuring program should arise the following basic effects:

- A higher efficiency of the system;
- Meeting the needs of the consumers on a better technical and financial basis;
- Materialising the conditions required for the connection to the European power system and the gradual affiliation to the free market system in Europe.

A main point that the present paper is considering to express is the fact that the evolution of the restructuring process will depend not only on activities (decisions, laws, settlements, institution building) which are to be carried out, but also on people working in the system, who have to assimilate the new relationships and skills required in order to enable the new institutions to function properly.

GENERAL STRATEGY OF THE NATIONAL POWER COMPANY OF ROMANIA (CONEL) REGARDING PERSONNEL TRAINING

Attaining the main goals of the organisation is the reason of building a general strategy; adapting it to the particular field of human resources has the aim of assuring convergence of personnel's attitudes and behaviour towards the above mentioned purposes of the organisation. Reflecting these goals in the human resources policy is a key element for achieving them. Developing professional and organisational behaviour of the employees in order to improve their skills and raise their performances is a major target, which can be reached only by improving the personnel training process [2]. With this aim in view, these are the main tracks to be followed:

- Supporting the personnel training programs, by every possible means:
 - settling and allocating an appropriate expenses budget, in order to ensure necessities and to provide the proper frame for this activity;
 - modernising the material basis and raising the quality standards of the training process;
 - widening the range of training objectives and programmes, adopting the most adequate methods to meet the present necessities and demands in this field of activity;
 - transferring to the subsidiaries and local branches of the Company the gravity centre of technical profile training;
 - developing and improving the managerial profile training in order to face the CONEL restructuring process;

- carrying out a managerial development program which should consider the best training (inside and outside the company) and career-building opportunities for future members of the company staff, having in view the enrichment of their knowledge in essential fields like: general management, marketing, finance, accountancy, law;
- encouraging and providing material support for organising professional competitions.
- Attracting and employing the best secondary and higher education graduates, having in view the personnel age-lowering and qualitative improvement processes;
- Offering CONEL scholarships for deserving students, creating opportunities for undergraduates to have their practical activities carried on in CONEL units;
- Establishing and preserving contacts with human resources providers, such as: educational units, economical agents, personnel recruiting agencies;
- Changing the pattern of the organisational culture by creating a new fundamental values system, which should display new issues:
 - orientation and engagement towards the complete satisfaction of the consumer community, together with environment observing ;
 - settling new performance criteria for the employees, raising the awareness of each one's contribution to the technical, economical and financial progress of the company;
 - awareness of belonging to a strong, modern company, able to offer high-qualified services.

THE PERSONNEL TRAINING CENTRE AND ACTIVITY AT THE PLOIESTI DISTRIBUTION BRANCH OF CONEL-ELECTRICA COMPANY

The managerial team of the Ploiesti Distribution Branch has been continuously investing in the professional training of its employees. Personnel training takes place in the company's own Training Centre, situated in the town of Campina. The facilities of the Centre also allowed organising, besides professional training of the employees, workshops and debates attended by CONEL staff, on the following issues [4]:

- Personnel training in transmission and distribution subsidiaries – concepts, quality, means, performances, informational changes;
- Training of risk estimators in transmission and distribution subsidiaries;
- Market economy elements in the power sector;
- Quality management;
- Electric power quality.

For the professional and work security training of the Ploiesti Distribution Branch employees, training groups for each specific activity have been created by nominating the attendants, period of training, issues to be discussed, professional training lecturers and work security instructors. The electricians, foremen and operational engineers attend training sessions every six months. The groups comprising office, designing and administrative personnel are included in the training programme with one to three year periodicity, also being part of an individual study programme, co-ordinated by department chiefs. Training programmes are attended by approx. 90% of the company employees.



Figure 2. The Personnel Training Centre in Campina of the Ploiesti Distribution Branch (ELECTRICA Company)

The Centre has also developed its Technical Library, as well as a set of individual programmes for the General Introductory Briefing, applying to newly employed personnel. The five years that passed since the beginning of the personnel training at the Centre were sufficient to establish a database displaying the results obtained by the employees. Due to the experience accumulated up to this date, the data are analysed and the results are evaluated according to the "Methodology of Evaluation of the Human Factor in CONEL". The analyse and evaluation materialise into a method of monitoring the results of the training process, consisting in:

- Observing the individual progress (or regress) and emphasising the specific tracks to be followed by the employee in order to improve his activity or behaviour;
- Ensuring the employee's reorientation if necessary, relating personal capacity and aptitudes to professional requirements;
- Identifying the outstanding elements to be promoted.

The Ploiesti Distribution Branch has developed its own Personnel Training Centre in order to refresh and improve the knowledge of the company employees both in the professional and in the work security fields. The staff of the Centre carries on their activity according to a Statute that allows the training process to be built upon the Quality System demands. The 'Statute of Professional Lecturers and Work Security Instructors' displays the tasks of the training staff, together with the main tracks to be followed for accomplishing them:

- Developing the professional and organisational behaviour of the employees by pointing out the key elements of professional culture;
- Emphasising the importance of professional training in order to perform activities of high economic efficiency, free of work accidents;
- Perceiving and acknowledging the professional risks, together with their prevention methods.

The futures Personnel Training Center Campina's Programs will include some important direction to extend the specific activity [4]:

- Meetings with foreman's and equip chiefs, for analyses, exposures, discussions with prior communicate subject matter. This program emphasis on participation and interactive learning creates an exciting and stimulating environment for all the participants. They share knowledge gained trough practical experience. Trough course assignments, they apply classroom learning to on-the-job problems and opportunities.
- Distance courses with technical staff study groups. These groups enhance the sharing of information and experience among participants and are a key to the richness of the PTC Campina experience. Composed of 5-7 participants occupying diverse hierarchical positions and job functions, study groups meet weekly outside of class to review course material and collaborate on term projects. Interaction within study groups creates tremendous additional learning opportunities and forges personal and professional relationships for long time.

- Projection and organization of foreign languages and computer skill Training Program. The PC courses will be organized in collaboration with Informational Department of SD Ploiesti. The target of these courses is following the operating systems knowledge for all the potential users, studying the frequent applications and presenting the news in the PC field.

- Continue to edit the periodical issue in power field – ElectaPH, the review which is reviving the tradition and the specialists of "Intreprinderea Regionala de Electricitate Ploiesti" preoccupation in the power field. In 1966 these pioneers were editing "Buletinul de Informare Tehnica si de Raspandire a Cunostintelor Profesionale".

- Organize Symposiums and Round Tables to present the papers published in the Prahova Power Review – ElectaPH. An original solution for raising the standards of personnel training activities consists in developing opinion tests focused on identifying impediments that occur during these activities, diminishing their quality level - and also defining the feed-back corrective actions. Such an enquiry has been carried on among the Centre's lecturers and instructors.

Notice has been made that the current system of personnel training is a coherent one, allowing systematic approach of complex themes. As a consequence, the training themes have been conceived by teams including lecturers, work security instructors, functional unit leaders, Technical Department and Quality System representatives.

A signal has been raised regarding the necessity of shortening the intervals between two training sessions for the dispatchers. Consequently, the dispatchers' training is currently taking place monthly.

Most of the lecturers admit that personnel's training is a challenging activity: an opportunity for communicating, informational sharing, together with the responsibility of updating and improving their own knowledge. Nevertheless, the absence of a financial motivation has been emphasised.

THE ATTITUDE OF CONEL EMPLOYEES' TOWARDS TRE REFORM STRATEGY

A questionnaire that intended to reveal the attitude of CONEL's employees towards reorganisation revealed a period of status, motivation and expectation crisis. Distorted auto- and heteroperceptions, fear for unknown, ambivalence, cognitive dissonance, anxiety, unconfidence in reorganisation's promoters – all of them are maladaptive responses, sources of stress, blocking the reform. Pro-reform positions were seldom adopted without objections. Employees are aware of the consequences (positive or negative) of the reform, but their awareness is strongly affected by emotional factors [4].

32% of the employees are favourable to the reform; nevertheless, they formulate objections such as:

- Reorganisation should affect bureaucratic structures, not operational personnel (unless technological changes occur);
- Selection should be made by equitable criteria, not as a result of corruption and hidden interests;

- Fear that reorganisation is a trick to enrich some managers of CONEL;
- Reform should be based upon economical, not political criteria.

They also expressed arguments to sustain their vote in favour of the reform:

- Greater adaptability and flexibility due to decentralisation;
- A more flexible remuneration policy, stimulating effectiveness;
- Eliminating bureaucracy; thus, shortening the distance between information and decisions;
- Eliminating losses and useless costs using rigorous accountancy;
- A promotion policy adequate to performance;
- A training programme proper to organisation's objectives.

50% of the employees refused the answer, invoking the absence of information.

18% are against the reform – assimilating this concept with negative consequences: unemployment, disorganisation, etc.

The culture of CONEL's employees is a contradictory one, a mixture of norms, behaviour stereotypes, values of two socio-economic models: an individualist, liberal, economically based model and a collectivist model, based on social redistribution, a relic of communism. Romanians approve the reform, theoretically; in fact, when reorganisation affects their interests, they reject it. As Jiri Menzel says: "Everybody wants to be Van Gogh but nobody wants to cut his ear." This explains the delays in accomplishing the reform, due to the fact that organisational changes also claim changes of mentality for the employees at four levels:

- Knowledge;
- Attitude;
- Individual behaviour;
- Group behaviour.

Administration, involving supervision and management of the organisation, is in charge of structure and system changes. These changes involve structure, strategy, policies, reward systems, labour relations, co-ordination devices, management information and control systems, accounting and budget systems.

An enquiry among electricians from SD Ploiesti revealed the trend toward participative management and a flexible structure of the organisation. They wish equilibrium between individuals and the organisation. Top management must be aware of the new wishes of employees and motivate them for reorganisation, diminish the psychological distance between hierarchical levels, generate compatibility between employees' and organisation's goals, making them aware of their contribution. Transparent managerial policies, good information and communication, training and contacts with dynamic cultures could establish a positive attitude towards reform.

Those who want their colleagues or subordinates change must also change themselves. Participative management shouldn't be just a tool or a process to managers, but a way

of life. The leader must respect employees, understand that beliefs precede practice, agree on the rights of workers, seize the difference between contracts and covenants and consider that personal relationships mean more than formal structure.

A transformational leader must have the ability to bring up change, innovation and entrepreneurship. He must motivate followers not only to follow his personality (a major trap in a post-communist country accustomed to obedience towards authorities) but also to believe in the organisation's vision, to recognise the need for reorganisation. The new practices, actions and values must be permanently adopted. This means major resources must be devoted to training programs focused on the restructuring process and on implementing the new organisational style. Reformatory elements, with positive and constructive thinking and attitude, should be identified and involved in the reorganisation process. Managers should promote:

- Strong corporate culture and positive work climate;
- Team spirit, group loyalty;
- Confidence, trust and communication between employees and managers;
- Decision making near information sources;
- Rewarding both managers (according to their performance) and deserving subordinates;
- Establishing and communicating organisational goals.

This latter issue should be discussed with other managers, developing a coalition that agrees which goals should be emphasised [5]. Goals give a sense of direction to organisation members. The stated end that an organisation is aiming at and strategies for reaching it motivate the employees. Motivation is even stronger if participants help selecting the goals.

- Informing the employees about the necessity and consequences of proposed changes. Educational efforts prevent false rumours, misunderstanding and resentment. Open communication gives managers an opportunity to explain the steps to be made; thus ensuring that implementation of change will attract no adverse reactions.

Early and extensive participation in a change should be a part of implementation. Participation gives to those involved a sense of control over the change. They understand it better and become committed to its successful implementation. Participation should normally begin in the initiation stage so that ideas and proposals from employees may be incorporated in the change design.

One of the most powerful sources of stress is the state of uncertainty - the employees accusing their managers for maintaining it. Such potential conflicts, as well as unions' opposition towards change, could be solved through open communication. This means explaining the alternative programs, their positive and negative consequences, costs and benefits. A subtle game of authoritative and participative methods is necessary for accomplishing the desired changes, as well as reconversion and social protection programmes. Training and perfecting managerial teams, in connection with workshops, seminars, learning by action could be reasonable methods and successful keys for reform in CONEL.

The enquiries that have been performed led to the following conclusions:

- Democracy gained ground but mostly in formal aspects than in mutual respect and effective results, leading to concessions in favour of the claimants and to the prejudice of organisational goals;
- Managers must clarify and allocate proper budgets for organisational objectives;
- Managers themselves should be assessed with specific methods by consulting firms (specialised in head-hunting);
- Reformatory, open-minded attitudes and performances aren't yet stimulated by a system of rewards. Punishments, as well as rewards, are collective, diminishing individual responsibility ;
- Assessment of employees' performances is formal and therefore, inadequate to specific policies for career development;
- Extrinsic motivation should be valorised more than intrinsic motivation, as communist propaganda diminished the importance of words and made any slogan ineffective.

RECONSIDERING HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY

An enquiry among the employees of SD Ploiesti revealed that 41% of them are not aware that training and career development are Human Resources Department responsibilities. They think that HRD means only evidence, clocking, delivering and keeping account of certificates and forms - a kind of perception that belongs to an outdated, obsolete concept of human resources worker.

Notice has been also made of an unnatural break between the HRD and the Training Centre, a break that affects human resources policies of the organisation. Specific policies (recruitment, training, promotion, reconversion, development) must be interrelated and adequate to organisation's objectives. It is the task of the Human Resources Department to promote and harmonise such policies, for the benefit of the organisation.

The great number of those who do not associate personnel training and career development to the HRD shouldn't be such a great surprise. The prototype perception of human resources worker in communist systems was that of an administrator making regulations, procedures, personnel

evidence, evaluation and remuneration. Training and career development were missing from the list of responsibilities. Currently, assimilating elements belonging to other sciences (politics, economy, law) is enriching this kind of job. In this respect, there are several important ideas to be emphasised:

- Human resources employees are now more educated and prepared for their job. This organisational transformation reflects both technological and social changes – democratisation of political and social life, diversification of social and societal interactions.
- People were recognised as the most valuable resource of the organisation - consequently, they must be motivated for high performances, assisted by training programmes to develop their careers. The relationship between organisation and individuals becomes more and more important. It is obvious that management practices may generate feelings of either alienation and hostility or commitment and motivation [5]. Through participative management, job enrichment and self-managed work teams, leaders can build a motivated and committed workforce. The connection between the science of management and behaviour sciences, especially psychology and sociology, applied to organisations, groups and individuals, helps improving their performances [6].
- It is essential to admit that leading people is an activity more connected with culture and more valuable than any other management practices. The change of human resources policies claims a good knowledge of organisational culture – the underlying set of key values, beliefs, understandings and norms shared by the employees. These values provide the link between the members of an organisation.

Notice should be made that improving employee's skills and strengthening their wish of improvement, productivity and results many raise without any growth of the expenses or labour force.

Personnel training means achieving better results while lowering stress, fatigue and losses; raising satisfaction and rewards; providing a general improvement for the company. That is why problems raised by this extremely important issue have to be faced with equal commitment by trainers, trained and company leaders.

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