

# HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN ADVERTISING AGENCY

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## *Abstract:*

*The paper presents advertising agencies as a new type of knowledge-based organizations (knowledge-intensive organizations), whose essential resource is its people with their competences, in conditions in which in the present society knowledge is becoming the most important source of competitive advantage for current organizations. Such professional services firms have to practice a particular type of management, focused on their employees, on their aspirations and satisfaction, therefore the component processes of the human resources management (recruitment, selection, integration, motivation etc.) have a particularly important role in obtaining employees' loyalty and increasing their performance and consequently in the survival and development of the company. The empirical research used case studies based on in-depth interviews with managers in Bucharest advertising organizations, but also a survey through questionnaire sent by e-mail to advertisers across the country, to provide a clear picture on the characteristics of human resources management in Romanian advertising agencies.*

*Key words: knowledge-intensive organization, advertising agency, human resources management, competences*

## **Introduction**

Nowadays, competition between organizations - becoming more flexible and innovative adhocracies - is "moving" more and more from the classic factors of production (land, capital) to the knowledge held by employees (Hoffman, 2004). "Knowledge is becoming a more important source of competitive advantage for current organizations - the creation, sharing and protecting knowledge is vital to their *health*. These processes have a higher meaning in knowledge-intensive organizations, which depend on the generation, use and originality of their fund of knowledge" (Donaldson, 2001, p. 957).

Today it pays particular attention to knowledge resource as an essential aspect of "human capital". If until the 1960-1970, the source of economic security for the most people was

keeping the workplace for a whole life, now more and more people (from advanced societies, with the mature market economy) find the source of economic security in the adequate accumulation of knowledge required by the market. Intellectual capital becomes a very important concept for those organizations whose strength is in knowledge; intellectual capital is the firm's knowledge, the experience, expertise and associated "soft" assets, rather than physical "hardware" and financial capital.

While in Taylorist technocentric management theory, man was treated as an inert instrument of executions of predetermined tasks, as a residue, his inventiveness being blocked and eliminated as dysfunctional and technology being considered the main resource, the anthropocentric management introduced by the

deconstructive perspective on organizations promotes a different image of man: „the most important factor of the organization is its people and their skills” (Alvesson, 2004, p. 138).

Knowledge-intensive enterprises are those companies that intangible intellectual assets, (skills, experience, knowledge, values held by the firm) have a greater importance than the material assets (buildings, technology, stock products etc. owned by enterprise) and financial capital.

This change requires the practice in organization of a new type of human resource management that will capitalize the man with all its dimensions (intellectual, moral, social, not only physical). "The man must be the ultimate objective of all activities of the organization and not a simply means of it; the organization generally must take into account the man's features, needs and aspirations” (Chelcea, Mărginean et al, 1980, p. 14).

We have identified the specific notice of advertising organizations as being their classification in typology of knowledge-intensive organizations, based on knowledge held by their employees. In this context, the article proposes a study with diagnostic value, designed to identify how they are performing human resources management (recruitment, selection, integration and motivation of employees) in the Romanian advertising agencies, where people and their creative ideas are the vital resource of this type of organization. Exploratory approach was based on two information sources, namely case studies on the basis of in-depth interviews in different types of advertising agencies in Bucharest and investigation through a short questionnaire mailed to some Romanian advertising agencies.

### **The essential role of human resources in the advertising agency, as a knowledge-intensive organization**

In a broad sense, knowledge-intensive organizations are organizations that offer knowledge or knowledge-based products - eg. plans, prototypes, software, messages, symbols contained in the ads for advertising agencies; in which the main resource is the intangible assets held by the organization (skills, experience, knowledge of employees, value), and not fixed assets (buildings, machines) and financial capital. Examples of knowledge-intensive organizations, which "sell" knowledge: consulting firms from different areas (financial, legal, accounting, management), media companies, advertising agencies, educational and research institutions and firms producing software etc.

Almost one third (32,6%) of the entire workforce in the European Union was working in the knowledge-intensive services in 2006, with a maximum of almost half of total employment in Sweden (47,5%) and Denmark (43,8%), Romania placing on the last place in the EU (with 14,5%) (Eurostat, 2008, p. 470). Knowledge-intensive work is a substantial part of all organizations and its economic significance may be even higher than these figures suggest, since they affect the practices of other organizations through the dissemination of ideas, technologies, standards, etc. (Alvesson, 2004)

The symbolic work - using ideas and concepts - is crucial, while the processing of materials or tangible services achievement is not so much now. "Cognitive activity guided by theory is important - or at least make a difference - in many situations and for many people in such organizations than other organizations" (Alvesson, 2004, p. 17).

Knowledge-intensive firms are defined as "companies within the work is most likely intellectual and skilled

employees, highly trained, represent the most labor force" (Alvesson, 2000, p. 1101); "*knowledge-intensive* attribute can be applied to firms in which knowledge is of greater importance than other inputs, and human capital, as opposed to the physical or financial one, dominate (Swart, Kinnie, 2003, p. 60), a key feature of such companies being their capacity to solve complex problems by developing creative and innovative solutions.

The essence of the activities of these companies is based on intellectual abilities of most employees; typical, a large proportion of employees have academic education and relevant experience. Formal education is seen as very useful in facilitating the theoretical and analytical skills, essential for such organizations; education can also be seen as an indicator of competence and as a legitimacy of expert status and high salaries of employees of these organizations. They are usually paid with wages above average and have high status, are being often called "gold collars". Some of the representatives of the advertising agencies in our research explicitly refer to the high education of their companies employees: in the A1 advertising agency "all 20 employees have higher education in various fields: some are graduates in law, others in communication, others in the fine arts, others in economics, in the A2 agency "all 11 employees have high education in journalism, either in communication sciences or economics", in A3 agency, of the 19 employees, all have higher education, graduated in the various specializations (some with very few links with advertising) – communication, engineering, director of theater and film, Law, Commerce or Marketing, those in the A4 form "a professional team", all of the 5 employees are entitled, either in engineering, law or marketing.

The main characteristic features of knowledge-intensive firms, which differ from other organizations by the nature

of work and how they are managed and organized, it refers to: high-skilled employees engaged in knowledge work, using symbolic and intellectual skills; a high degree of autonomy and flatten organizational hierarchies; the use of flexible, adaptive, ad hoc organizational forms; the need for extensive communication for coordination and problems solving, due to a high level of ambiguity; customer orientation, especially in professional services firms etc. (Alvesson, 2004, pp. 21, 38-39)

But an organization with features listed above, to achieve its societal effectiveness (production of knowledge to be used by other organizations) should have a proper management characterized by flexibility, autonomy granted creators, motivation, professional development opportunities offered to them etc., in other words an anthropocentric management to design an organization with adhocratical structure, focused on man and not only on strict performance of tasks. "This is not just to use more and better man (man as a means), but first, to consider that the man is the ultimate objective and to understand what organization can do and what must do so the man achieve himself humanly in and through work" (Hoffman, 1999, pp. 50, 55).

The present empirical research was conducted on two levels, using a mix of several techniques of qualitative research: six case studies based on face-to-face intensive interviews with a number of managers in Bucharest advertising organizations (based on semi-structured interview guide); survey used a questionnaire sent by e-mail to advertisers across the country (out of 265 questionnaires sent, we received responses from 13 agencies).

We used qualitative research because it was not a well known phenomenon that we had to measure its intensity, but it was approached a type of organization (advertising agency) whose characteristics were not yet sufficiently outlined, following more

complex and complete descriptions and explanations. Subjects who responded to interviews were managers or heads of departments in agencies, for due to position they hold, they know the issues covered by our research and therefore they provided us relevant data.

Our diagnosis study has only a descriptive-exploratory character (can not be considered representative), in view of the new issue of knowledge-intensive organizations of advertising, but also the difficulty of access in organizations of this type, which due to competition specific to advertising domain is working with a recognized lack of transparency of management used (Leovavidis, 2008).

There are few studies in the international literature made in such knowledge-intensive organizations, to mention those of Mats Alvesson in a multinational computer professional services company (Alvesson, 1995) and in a Swedish advertising agency (Alvesson, 1994), of Maxine Robertson and Jacky Swan in a consultancy firm (Robertson, Swan, 2003), of Peter Svensson in a marketing agency (Svensson, 2003) or of Maxine Robertson and Geraldine O'Malley also in an advertising agency (Robertson, O'Malley, 2000). They are made, as our research, based on qualitative methodology, specifically through in-depth interviews with employees and managers, in addition with content analysis of specialized magazines and with observation.

### **Recruitment and selection of employees in advertising agencies**

Recruitment represent activity of identifying and attracting in the organization, on an adequate base and sufficiently large number of people who prove the skills and training necessary to apply to a vacancy or to be created job (Stanciu, Ionescu et al, 2003, p. 187).

Most methods used to recruit candidates for selection are:

1. enabling the human resources department for the identification of their own employees, to recruit for selection on other posts than those they occupy at the time given;

2. direct and indirect advertising (media);

3. turning circle of individuals and organizations in entourage of company;

4. turning their own counselors who consult directly different mediums;

5. analysis of all individual employment application voluntarily addressed to human resources department of the organization etc.

If the recruitment process aims to encourage people to seek a job in an organization, the selection process aims to identify and employ the most qualified applicants; with this opportunity are chosen, according to some criteria and principles pre-established by the organization and implemented by the department of human resources, the most suitable candidates to fill vacancies posts, to development or restructuring the organization (Stanciu, 2001, p. 127).

Regarding agencies where they were made in-depth interviews with their managers and case studies, in the A1 full-service advertising agency, part of a multinational network (with 20 employees), „recruitment is done by turning the circle of individuals and organizations from entourage of the agency (i.e. through recommendations), or through analysis of all CVs sent voluntarily to organization and stored in the database”. The selection has one step, the interview with the head of the department where potential new employee will work. Whatever of he read in the candidate's CV, creative director says that "he necessarily meets with each candidate and, after a free discussion of 5-10 minutes with him, he *read* him, he realizes if he is the right person and if he wants to work with that person"; human contact is considered

essential in the choice, and therefore they no longer give practical exams.

In A2 creative agency with Romanian capital (with 11 employees) "recruitment is done by turning the circle of people and organizations in agency entourage (in other words, the recommendations), or more rarely, through ads in the press about vacant existing jobs". The selection has one step, the interview with the staff leaders (with the General Manager and possibly with creative director) – the general manager said that the main reasons that a candidate could use to persuade her to hire him are passion, enthusiasm to work in advertising domain, persistence in trying to learn the secrets of this area and, last but not least, the dynamism, energy.

In A3 full-service agency with Romanian capital (with 19 employees) „recruitment of new employees is generally done through ads on the Internet, and rarely it is appealing to the recommendations (of those already employed in the agency), but in both cases the candidates are called to interview, sometimes 2-3 times. The client service director says that the criteria on which selects potential employees for his department are primarily compatibility ("to like him as a man, to work and then teamed up with him") and secondly the experience they giving proof. But he recognizes that the main criterion of choice, intuitive sometimes, has failed - "I hired people that they did a very good impression at interview and I trusted them, and then turned out to be completely different". Because the agency to avoid such situations, there are periods of probation, before final employment.

Regarding recruitment in A4 production advertising agency with Romanian capital (with 5 employees), the agency's leaders knows what requirements must meet the employee they need, and call to recommendations, but candidates must go through an interview, in which

"priority criterion of selection is the ability to develop himself, and only the second is experience", the technical director states: "when I hired the person who makes the graphics on your computer, it mattered not that he had no experience and little just graduated, but we liked that it was willing to learn".

For full-service advertising agency A5, part of a well known multinational agencies group with branches worldwide, with 90 employees, recruitment sources are either other agencies or schools in domain etc. ("I say to Human Resources person that I need a Strategic Director and she found me a few candidates"). After a discussion with those in HR, potential employee talks with the department head where he will work. The selection criteria of research and strategy director are the experience, especially sympathy (interpersonal compatibility), "he should be on the same wavelength with me" (issue often considered even more important than the portfolio).

In the marketing department of the Romanian subsidiary of a well known European food companies are working 15 employees, most have studies in the field of marketing. General Director of the marketing department says that initially were hired people with experience in marketing, because "we did not have time to grow young people without experience in the field". Then they hired young people in department, who were subsequently promoted, because in the meantime they have acquired the necessary experience to become Seniors.

Conditions for selection in the department that she lead are not as strictly related to formal education, because "they can learn from daily experience, from in courses which they will be sent" as much as attitude: applicants who will to be accepted must be flexible, open to new, ambitious, eager and able to work and continuously learn (especially as regards the "new entry" level).

Regarding education, it is necessary however to have economic concepts and have the ability to work with numbers (they have to interpret and analyze statistical data etc.).

The selection criteria based on which new employees are accepted in advertising agencies are relevant to the identification on the one hand, some of the features of organizational culture (being known that in most agencies, "match with company" is one of the criteria which take into account, tacitly, who organizes the selection) and on the other hand some of the specific qualities necessary to advertising employees in general and advertising creators in particular.

The selection criteria that were most frequently mentioned as important by the managers who responded to questions sent by e-mail are:

- Compatibility with the organization and the team is a key criterion in an activity that is working on projects in teams ("we evaluate compatibility with the organization", "he must match all the company values", "he must match the rest of the team. He may be the best creative or account, if his personality not matches the team, he is not hired".

- Closely related to the previous condition, it is required to potential employees the ability to work as a team, be friendly and open ("people should be open and unembarrassed, able to think alone, but together with the team. We are not interested in Individualists at any price and stars", "They must be open and communicative, able to work as a team", "Future employees must be open, friendly").

- Passion for work in advertising and the desire for involvement, creativity, talent, intelligence, "open mind" are essential qualities in creative work in advertising, which often have elements in common with art ("they must be first persons willing to engage. I'm looking for people willing to engage in a long-term team", "Talent, passion,

desire to work, taking responsibility for own work", "It requires intelligence, open mind", "First we evaluate the skills and talent for a particular job").

- Common sense, sense of responsibility, seriousness, respect for the customer are essential traits of those who want to obtain results in companies that provide services ("From a new employee we need the sense of responsibility and respect towards colleagues and customers", "But common sense and correct assessment of their skills matter", "Seriousness is more important than knowledge").

Other qualities that agencies want to prospective employees is the spirit of initiative and spontaneity, as a reflection of creative nonconformist minds; and ambition and determination, justified in a field as competitive as it is advertising ("They must be people with well established objectives, who know what they want and what they can do", "ambitious, with strong personality, determined and focused, people who clearly know what they want to do"). It is added the desire to improve themselves, to "learn more and faster, to evolve", as necessary quality in a very dynamic sector such as advertising.

Although 2-3 managers indicates between necessary conditions for a candidate to be elected, "good knowledge in the field", "past performance", "education", "technical skills", however, the criteria of formal nature (educational preparation, experience) matter less to most managers, for them another kind of qualities matter (in particular those listed above): "Work experience in a similar post is not a fundamental criterion (maybe only in situations which otherwise may not be, on sales, new business, strategy jobs - but are not supreme, other things can make a difference)", "We never ask a future employee if he has a degree or even finished high school. Selection is made entirely from practice tests", "he need

not have experience, but had to be semi-professional experience in college", "to show that he is best applicant for the job".

### **Integration of employees in advertising agencies**

The professional integration programs aim a person's assimilation into the professional medium and adapt him to the group to which he is part (Mathis, Nica et al., 1997, p. 146). Integration means the achieving of compliance between employee's skills and aspirations and job characteristics. It does not involve he is "assimilated", does not mean the loss of his identity in all of group interests; the employee's integration is to identify common interests of the organization and of the employee and getting results on both sides.

In the A2 agency, the integration of new employees regarding administrative issues (responsibilities which they have to face) is made by the two leaders of the company, but general manager says that "it is important that new employees to know also to *steal* craft", in other words, there are a number of issues where the new employee is initiated alone. In A3 agency the integration of new employees is in charge of head of the departement where the new job occurred, he introduces him to the team, shows him what he have to done in the first days, "he coordinates him until he get acquainted ith the agency".

In A4 agency, the integration of new employee is made with both colleagues and the management participation, "everybody helps, just as we are a small family".

In A5 agency the integration of a new employee depends on his experience - if he has already 4-5 years experience in an agency, research director think that integration is not a necessary step; but if he just graduated and has no experience, he will help him at the beginning ("but not in the sense

that I'll do training with him two hours a day), but it is important for him to "learn on the go". "We need firmness and patience", because at he beginning the new junior employee will do very light activities (translations, multiplication of documents etc.), under his expectations, until he will learn to familiarize with the agency, then will enter in the work for which he was hired, but without to assigne clients to him initially.

### **Motivation of employees in advertising agencies**

In most of specialized works, motivation of human resources means to stimulate employees, with different interests and needs, to contribute positively and efficiently for fulfilling the objectives of the organization (Stanciu, Ionescu et al., 2003). Traditionally, the salary is the main way to motivate staff, but usually, people have also other needs or opportunities of expression: the need to learn through work, the need to make decisions, to be recognized as professional, need help configuring their own future etc. To motivate people in their work is not only give them the money and other facilities for their contribution to organization profit, through initiative and effort, but is also to develop in employee a sense of his professional and social fulfillment.

As regards the means of motivation to create the employees' attachment to agency, managers of advertising agencies in our country mention in the foreground, intangible (psychosocial) incentives, which are most different:

- Providing a work environment "comfortable and pleasant", "very open and friendly", "stress free, easy", feature at which contributes to a large extent also the organization of teambuildings ("exits in the city, weekly tennis games, Counter Strike championships or bowling weekend"), in order to build strong relations team.

- Creation of a distinct organizational identity (eg, "the belonging to the agency spirit").

- Recognition and appreciation of merits, encouraging of employees.

- Offering opportunities for professional development ("as a tool for development and performance"), promotions (which may include also "offering assistants in carrying out activities"), giving new responsibilities, offering trainings. For example, "agency offers each employees the opportunity to learn (crafts in advertising is not taught at school in Romania, unfortunately) from the genuine professionals, validated by results; personal development opportunity as a professional and as an individual (anyone may move as quickly without limits)".

- Respect for employees and enhancing self esteem by sending "a sense that they are listened and that everyone's work counts.

- Management practicing of transparency about company and trying to emotionally engage the employees in agency projects ("I am counting on the human relationship between me and staff and I am communicating them company's exact situation at any time. I am trying to involve them emotionally in projects and firm").

- Increased self-esteem through membership of a prestigious agency, with reputation in the field. Thus, "the agency provides each employee results - the agency is competitive in the industry, a proof being Effie Gold Award obtained for the most effective advertising campaign in food".

- Granting trust to employees by offering them greater freedom - "Everybody learns along they should not wait to tell them someone to go to work or not to lose time. If someone is ending his project part with 2 days earlier, he can take a mini-vacation of their own without requiring the agreement of anyone. He just has to communicate this before".

To these there are added, not least, also financial motivation means, under various forms: "fair salary" (proportional with the effort and results), progressive increase of salary, clearly defined systems of bonuses ("bonus salary for the employee of the month"), the premium as commission of contracts ("individual premium two times per year depending on performance"), "bonuses for all employees for Christmas, Easter or name days".

Also from the category of material rewards are not missing awards granted to employees to reward performance obtained ("awarding of successes"): "awards related to hobbies", diplomas, free holidays, free travel outside offered by agency.

Indirectly, are also mentioned some motivation means that affect the growth of the employees' attachment: freedom ("freedom plus support are the most valuable things that a copywriter wants to receive, and if it receives, in a way that makes him responsible"), prizes and money ("I think that for creative man most money and prizes matter most", "it is also very important to us, an award that I hope to put it in the window") and their professional success, which increases self esteem ("the most important success is to see people putting in baskets the brands you for, that is *the real thing*", "the most important for a successful creative is to have a very good idea, with emphasis on *very*").

In this context, there are identified a number of difficulties in motivating of employees in advertising agencies: "it would like that sometime the people in your agency to make a surprise and go or may not be as creative in your agency like the one from which they come, indicating quite convincing that the issue might be at the manager of the agency" (Langwost, 2008). HR people in creative industries (not only advertising but also in architecture, communication, games etc.) must learn how to develop the potential of a



person. "The problem is that big companies do not invest in people, but in things (servers, machines, buildings) and this is a short-term thinking, because people make the company grow, the advertising agency is a business of ideas. If you have better people, you will have better business. If you have good people, you should help them to grow and become better, because your business will improve" (Langwost, 2008).

There are enumerated three major problems of human resources management in advertising agencies (Langwost, 2008):

a. Most companies do not have personal development plans for employees. Once a year, it should discuss with employees about their objectives, in what direction they can develop, where they propose to get after a year, and for everything to be clear, these goals must be perceived as well approved by both parties. And then it has to discuss the types of training that people need to achieve those objectives.

b. The training is seen as a reward. If you think that a person must go first to training after 2 years in agency, then you lost 2 years when you could have a better employee if you sent him to the training at first. And if the person leaves after half a year at another agency, he takes all the knowledge with him, at the other agency. We recommend that the HR people and people who pay for training to invest at the beginning of the process. When you hire someone is because you trust him, and when you trust someone, invest in him so you see him performing to higher level. The investment must be made at the beginning of the process, not the end.

c. HR is not taken seriously enough. Often, it's made with half a measure of a secretary or a manager assistant who is not prepared and not have the necessary tools for such activities.

## Conclusions

Research conducted on the activities of human resources management, based on interviews with managers of some Romanian advertising agencies, puts emphasize a number of relevant issues, that make advertising agencies differ from firms with another object of activity, focusing on compatibility with the team and organizational culture of the agency as the selection criterion, on intangible (psychosocial) means of motivation as autonomy, flexibility, cooperation, prestige of agency, individual development, fostering creativity and initiative etc.

The knowledge-intensive enterprises emerges through the significance they accord to quality and motivations of their employees; although many of them are dependent largely on their image (organization brand) or connections network that develop, generally around a client portfolio, however the most important factor are people, and from here the emphasis on their competence and on loyalization, by practicing an adequate and particular human resources management.

This classification, at pattern level, of advertising agency in the category of adhocratical organizations (with flatten hierarchies, decentralized management and decision taken by autoresponsible groups etc.), and moreover, knowledge-intensive, knowledge-based ones, was dictated by the very nature of its activity - the advertising agency is an organization whose function, in the making of ads and ad campaigns, are based not on material goods, but on the intangible ones, on the message, idea, suggestion, despite their physical support (poster, video tape, etc.). And in those circumstances, it's essential the effort of creators of these intangible assets, of agencies creatives, whose competences is the most important capital of agencies, that's why the investment in their development and

their satisfaction should be the prime concerns of the managers of these organizations.

The present survey, only of such type in specialized Romanian literature, has approached the advertising phenomenon from a perspective rarely studied, the organizational one, characterizing advertising agencies as knowledge-intensive organizations, essentially based on the skills of its employees. We made a diagnosis of the

situation of the human resources management in a number of agencies in the local advertising industry, identifying a need for practicing a human resource management which comes from an anthropocentric management perspective, so that put man, his motivation and satisfaction on first plan of its activities, in order to increase his creative performances and to loyalize him.

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