

# Transparency in Public Administration and the Conflict of Social Roles

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The article is a modified version of the paper prepared under the academic guidance of Professor Ewa Łętowska, the former Polish national ombudsman, for Collegium Invisibile in Warsaw.

## A brief outline of the article:

### *Transparency and public administration*

The concept of transparency has been applied to the general field of governance. Enforced by the values of a civil society and empowered by the information revolution, transparency became a life-motif for many democratic governments in their reforms of public administration. Hence, the idea of *Transparent Public Administration*.

### *Why did it happen?*

Transparent Public Administration is the answer to an increasing public pressure for greater accountability of public servants and for reinventing, innovating and streamlining government structures, regulations and procedures. Citizens want public officials to behave and act appropriately to certain moral or ethical codes of conducts. They also expect governments to provide some kind of social safety nets, which will be economically manageable, and services, which will be delivered as efficiently and effectively as the ones carry out by the private sector. Thus, a subsequent development of the notion of Transparent Public Administration aims at meeting growing public dissatisfaction with bureaucratic sluggishness and inertia that is reflected in the existing legitimacy crisis, which effects state's institutions generally and governmental administration specifically.

### *What actually is Transparent Public Administration?*

The ideal model of Transparent Public Administration is characterized by:

- a) *openness* (accessibility) of administration and its staff,
- b) *visibility* of various mechanisms and structures due to *simplicity* of different rules and regulations,
- c) *explanatory* decision-making and decision-presenting process, which illustrates in a complete and understandable way why and how particular administrative decisions or conducts were undertaken and implemented.

Openness, visibility, simplicity and explanatory character of decisions lead to administrative *clarity*, thus making the work of public administration more *comprehensible* to ordinary citizens.

### *Conflicts of social roles hinders transparency in public administration*

The process of building Transparent Public Administration is undermined by the existence of conflicts of social roles. In the article, sixteen different conflicts of roles present in the public administration were distinguished and described. These conflicts flourish because civil servant must perform different social roles. A civil servant can simultaneously enact various roles: that of a superior in relations to other civil servants, a subordinate and thus loyal to a political superior (minister), a professional and dedicated to "public good", a private person with his/her own narrow private interest. Conflicts of social roles can be weakened via the implementation of certain ethical and managerial reforms, which would aim, among other things, at strengthening the idea of public ethos in the minds of those, who are working in the government agencies.