

Professional Experience and its Implication while Exerting Autonomy. The Case of Suceava City Hall

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Abstract

For successful local administration process people working in the local public administration system need autonomy in carrying out the duties their function involves. One of the determining factors for autonomy at work is professional experience obtained in the field. In this respect, in this article we intend to analyze the link between the experience in local public administration system and the degree of autonomy exercised in the function held, by considering the specific situation of Suceava City Hall. The developed research has shown that a small professional experience tends to be associated with a low degree of autonomy and a high professional experience tends to be associated with a high degree of autonomy. The owners of a great professional experience demonstrate ability, skill and confidence in the performance of their duties, hence their ability to decide and act autonomously in the function held, and vice versa.

Keywords: *autonomy, work experience, function, public dignitary, public servant*

JEL Classification: *H83*

Introduction

There have been different judgments expressed by different specialists about autonomy at work, an approach that we consider relevant to the study that we are undertaking is the one offered by Stamps P.L. and Piedmonte E.B., who argue that autonomy can be defined as “the amount of independent work, initiative and freedom, either permitted or required, in professional activities”¹. To a brief inventory of the literature we found that this is not generous in giving us explanations about the influence that professional experience obtained in a field has on autonomy exercised in the function held. In an attempt to overcome this drawback, we quote Lin B.Y.-J., Lin Y.-K., Lin C.-C. and Lin T.-T., who argue that “many employees' personal characteristics and aspects of their employment status might be possible factors for autonomy at work; these characteristics are: age, gender, education, employment training, working

¹ Stamps P.L., Piedmonte E.B., *Nurses and work satisfaction*, Ann Arbor MI, Health Administration Press, 1986, apud Jin M.H., Lee M.Y., “The effects of autonomy, experience, and person-organization fit on job satisfaction: the case of public sector”, *The International Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2012, p. 20, available at <http://www.tijoss.com/6thVolume/Myung.pdf> [accessed on September 22, 2014]

experience in years, the status (permanent or fixed-term employment) and the population in the areas served”². Considering the research developed in the pages of this paper, we note “the professional experience expressed in years” as a determinant of the autonomy at work.

In such a registry, using the scientific approach undertaken, we intend to highlight the implications of professional experience obtained in local public administration system on the autonomy in carrying out the function held. From this direction, we consider justified the following question: *What effect has the professional experience on the autonomy in exercising the function held?*

The overall objective of the approach developed consists in *observing professional experience gained in local public administration system, in order to highlight its influence upon the autonomy in carrying out the function held.*

Subsumed under the overall objective, we plan through the work developed to reach *specific goals* defined as follows:

- indicating the professional experience gained by dignitaries and public servants in local public administration institutions;
- establishing the degree of autonomy in exercising the function held by considering the actual situation encountered in the City Hall of Municipality of Suceava;
- highlighting the relation between the professional experiences obtained and the degree of autonomy in exerting the function held.

On this base, in order to focus the entire scientific research, we assume the existence of a positive direct link between the professional experience and the degree of autonomy in the function held. In other words, we start the research from the development of the following hypothesis: *The higher professional experience tends to increase the degree of autonomy in exercising the function held.*

In order to achieve the general objective, specific objectives, and to verify the hypothesis, we resort, from a methodological perspective, to the dominant quantitative approach. This approach allows us to appeal to the systematization, medium sizes, indicators of variance, association, correlation. The necessary data will be collected using the research based on a questionnaire survey, which provides information on the specific situation existing at the local public administration level. By conducting the survey, we investigate the opinion of dignitaries and public servants³ in local public administration of Suceava on their professional experience obtained in the system and its implications on the autonomy in exerting their jobs.

The Professional Experience in Local Public Administration System

In the beginning of analyzing the responses of dignitaries and public servants from the local public administration, we consider appropriate a brief overview of the sample defined for them.

Of the 72 dignitaries and public servants in local public administration that responded to the questionnaire applied, most are aged between 30 and 40 (30 people), and the least consistent is the category of respondents aged over 60 (3 people) (see Table 1):

² Lin B.Y.-J., Lin Y.-K., Lin C.-C., Lin T.-T., “Job autonomy, its predispositions and its relation to work outcomes in community health centers in Taiwan”, *Health Promotion International*, Vol. 28, Issue 2, 2013, p. 169, available at <http://heapro.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2011/12/25/heapro.dar091.full> [accessed on September 22, 2014]

³ Bilouseac, I., *Servicii publice locale*, Didactică și Pedagogică Publishing House, București, 2013, pp. 161-163

Table 1. Age distribution of the sample of dignitaries and public servants from City Hall of Municipality of Suceava

		Age			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Under 30 years	8	11.1	11.1	11.1
	Between 30 - 40 years	30	41.7	41.7	52.8
	Between 41 - 50 years	23	31.9	31.9	84.7
	Between 51 - 60 years	8	11.1	11.1	95.8
	Over 60 years	3	4.2	4.2	100.0
	Total	72	100.0	100.0	

Source: author's elaboration using SPSS

Most respondents are execution public servants (83.33%). The fewest responses came from public dignitaries (1.39%), as it was expected (see Figure 1):

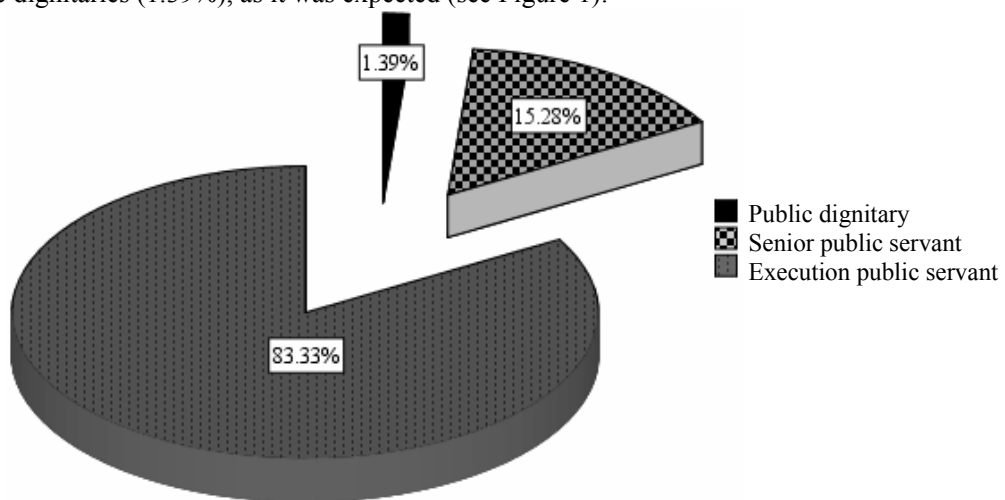


Fig. 1. Staff distribution of the sample of dignitaries and public servants of the City Hall of the Municipality of Suceava

Source: author's elaboration using SPSS

In this research, an important issue refers to the professional experience of the respondents dignitaries and public servants of the Institution of Suceava City Hall and in order to highlight it we took into account their years of experience in the system. The *average age* of respondents in the local public administration system is 3.15, corresponding to the category “5 to 10 years” (see Table 2):

Table 2. Average and standard deviation for the variable professional experience of respondents dignitaries and public servants from City Hall of Municipality of Suceava

Statistics		
How many years have you been working in the local public administration system?		
N	Valid	72
	Missing	0
Mean		3.15
Std. Deviation		1.183

Source: author's elaboration using SPSS

The sample structure consisting of dignitaries and public servants of local public administration of Suceava using classification seniority is as follows (see Figure 2):

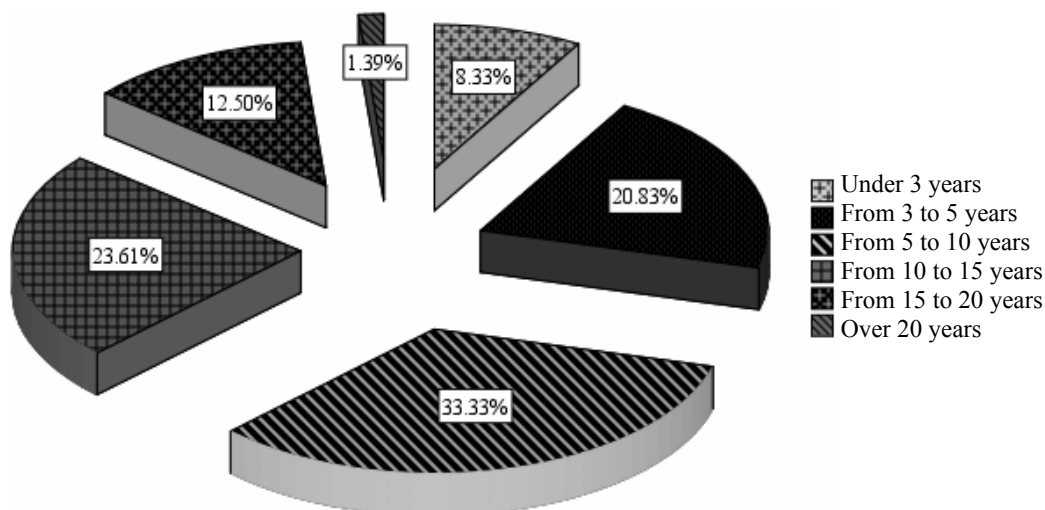


Fig. 2. Classification seniority of the sample of the respondents dignitaries and public servants from City Hall of Municipality of Suceava

Source: author's elaboration using SPSS

From the analysis of the sample structure of dignitaries and public servants in the local public administration using classification seniority results that most of the respondents (33.33%) have an experience between 5 and 10 years, and the least respondents have over 20 years of professional experience (1.39%). These results are consistent with the data according to the age structure of the sample observed, the majority of respondents (41.7%) aged between 30 and 40 and the fewest answers coming from respondents aged over 60 (4.2%) (see Table 1).

The Administrative Autonomy in Carrying Out the Function Held

We continued the approach by investigating the opinion of dignitaries and public servants from the local public administration of Suceava on the autonomy in the exercise of the function held.

Being questioned about the concept of local autonomy, the responses of dignitaries and public servants in local public administration of Suceava reveal the thorough knowledge of it. The average for the variable *awareness of the concept of local autonomy* is 3.94. It means that respondents know the meaning of the term, appreciating that the specified statement describes it "well" (see Table 3):

Table 3. Average and standard deviation for the variable *awareness of the concept of local autonomy* of the respondents dignitaries and public servants from City Hall of Municipality of Suceava

Statistics		
How well describes local autonomy the phrase "the right to manage local affairs independently, in the name and interest of the local community"?		
N	Valid	72
	Missing	0
Mean		3.94
Std. Deviation		.625

Source: author's elaboration using SPSS

The study of the perception of dignitaries and public servants from the local public administration of Suceava on *the concept of local autonomy* shows that most of the respondents (83.33%) believe that the statement mentioned describes “well” (69.44%) and “very well” (13.89%) the notion (see Figure 3):

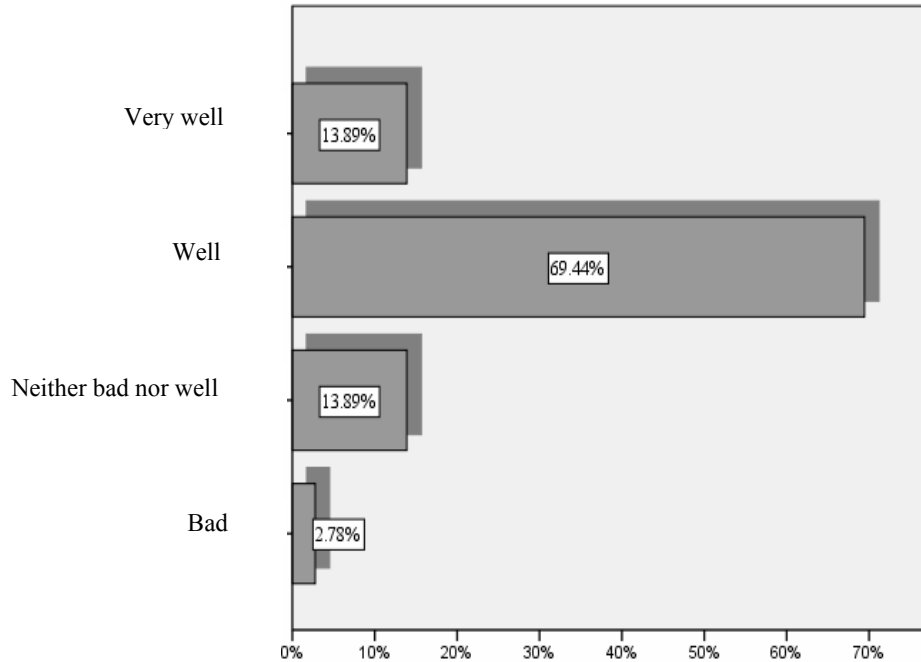


Fig. 3. Opinion of respondents dignitaries and public servants from City Hall of Municipality of Suceava on *the concept of local autonomy*

Source: author's elaboration using SPSS

The results registered could be attributed to the fact that, since the autonomy influences the work done, currently intersecting its manifestations, the local public administration respondents of Suceava cannot be otherwise than familiar with the concept, which is not surprising.

To estimate the degree of autonomy in the exercise of the function held we calculated statistic indicators to characterize the average and standard deviation level. The following table shows the average and the standard deviation of respondents' answers on the variable *degree of autonomy in the exercise of the function held* (see Table 4):

Table 4. Average and standard deviation for the variable *degree of autonomy in exerting the function held* of respondents dignitaries and public servants from City Hall of Municipality of Suceava

Statistics		
Which of the following statements best describes your situation in the function you exert?		
N	Valid	72
	Missing	0
	Mean	2.49
	Std. Deviation	1.007

Source: author's elaboration using SPSS

The analysis of data presented in the above table shows that the average *variable degree of autonomy in exerting the function held* is 2.49, which means that respondents claim that while fulfilling the function held someone else decides what to do, but they decide how to do.

Regarding the opinion on *the degree of autonomy in exerting the function held*, the analysis of responses reveals that about half of the respondents (44.44%) think that they have some freedom to decide what to do and how to do while exerting their jobs. For the same percentage of respondents (44.44%) the degree of autonomy in function lacks (20.83%) or exists only in terms of the execution of decisions taken by others (23.61%), whereas only 2.78% of respondents stated that they decide what and how to do while performing their function (see Figure 4):

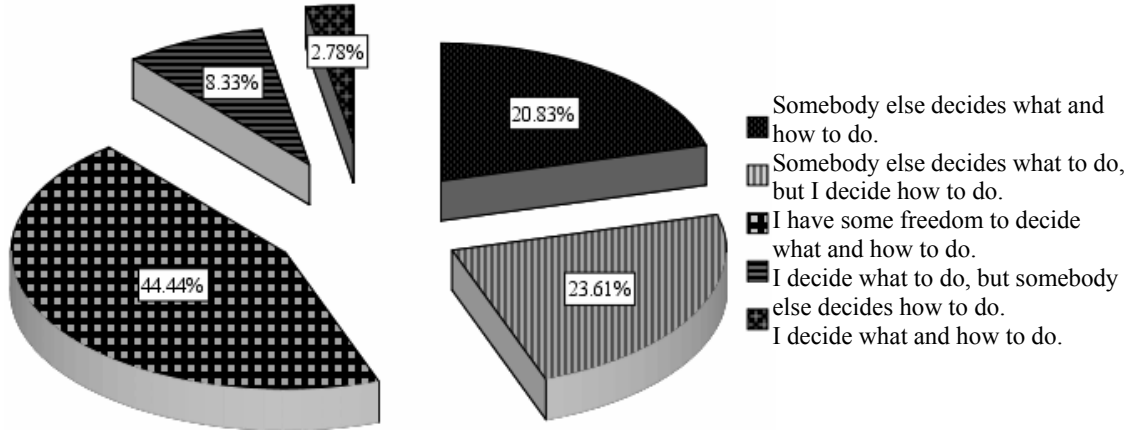


Fig. 4. Opinion of respondents dignitaries and public servants from City Hall of Municipality of Suceava on the degree of autonomy *in exerting the function held*

Source: author's elaboration using SPSS

Indeed, since most of the respondents (83.33%) are execution public servants and the least consistent are public dignitaries (1.39%) (see Figure 1), the results were predictable. As most of the respondents are executants, they exert their function under the guidance of others. Therefore, for them, the degree of autonomy in function may be absent, can be reduced or at most average. On the other hand, a full degree of autonomy in the function they exercise was expected for public dignitaries, they responding as leaders of local public institutions.

Referring to the importance of autonomy in the fulfillment of their duties, the analysis of the dignitaries and public servants' perception from the local public administration of Suceava reveals its importance. The average for the variable *importance of autonomy in exerting the function held* is 3.63, which means that the autonomy is important for the respondents (see Table 5):

Table 5. Average and standard deviation for the variable *importance of the autonomy in exerting the function held* by respondents, dignitaries and public servants from City Hall of Municipality of Suceava

Statistics		
How important is the autonomy for the performance of the duties in the function you held?		
N	Valid	72
	Missing	0
Mean		3.63
Std. Deviation		1.093

Source: author's elaboration using SPSS

From the analysis of the opinion of dignitaries and public servants from the local public administration of Suceava on *the importance of the autonomy in exerting the function held* results that most of the respondents (68.06%) say that autonomy is important (50%) and very important (18.06%) (see Figure 5):

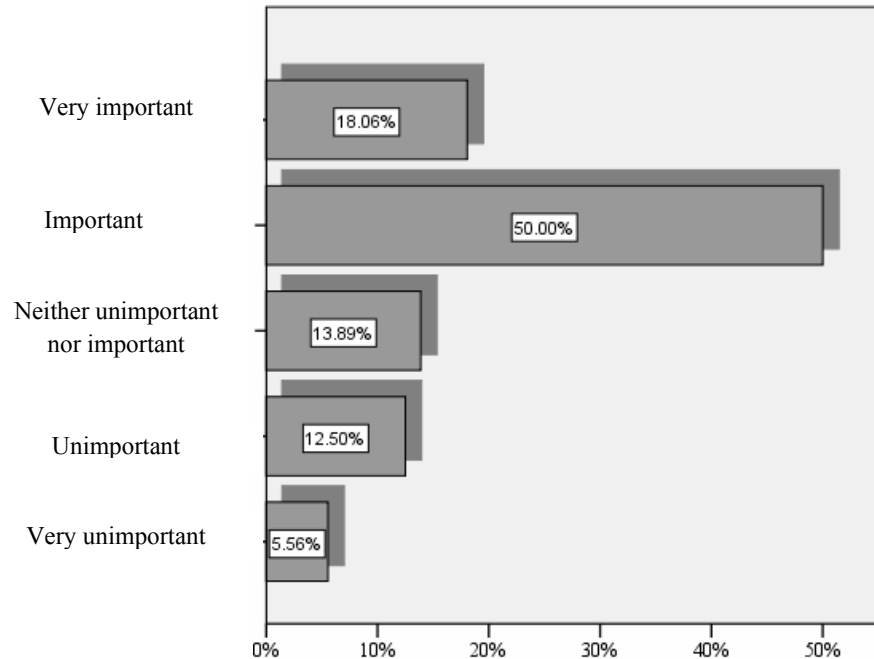


Fig. 5. Opinion of dignitaries and public servants from City Hall of Municipality of Suceava on the importance of autonomy in the function held

Source: author's elaboration using SPSS

The observed results can be explained by the fact that, whereas most of the time, the autonomy is placed in relation to freedom, decision, independence, the dignitaries and public servants of Suceava local public administration support its importance in fulfilling their duties in the function held, being convinced that it could optimize their activity.

The Association Analysis between the Professional Experience and the Degree of Autonomy in the Function Held

To check whether there is association between the variables considered, namely the professional experience in the local public administration system and the degree of autonomy in the exercise of the function held, we used the association table.

Such a table shows in its cells common frequencies of the occurrence of the variants of the analyzed variables, the interpretation of the existence or nonexistence of the association between them being made according to the distribution, size and differences between frequencies recorded⁴.

The association table provides information both about the existence or nonexistence of a link, as well as about its direction. Thus, depending on frequency distribution in the table, it can be observed that, on average, the increasing of a variable registers growths (or, as applicable, decreases) of the other variable, determine whether the connection is direct or inverse.⁵

The analysis of the association between the variables considered is as follows (see Table 6):

⁴ Harja, E., Țimiraș, L. C., *Metode statistice utilizate în cercetarea de marketing*, Alma Mater Publishing House Bacău, 2009, p. 110

⁵ Idem, p. 113

Table 6. Association between professional experience of the dignitaries and public servants and the degree of autonomy in the function held

How many years have you been working in the local public administration system? * Which of the following statements best describes your situation in the function you exert?							
Crosstabulation							
% within How many years have you been working in the local public administration system?							
		Which of the following statements best describes your situation in the function you exert?					Total
		Somebody else decides what and how to do.	Somebody else decides what to do, but I decide how to do.	I have some freedom to decide what and how to do.	I decide what to do, but somebody else decides how to do.	I decide what and how to do.	
How many years have you been working in the local public administration system?	Under 3 years	66.7%	16.7%	16.7%			100.0%
	From 3 to 5 years	33.3%	40.0%	20.0%	6.7%		100.0%
	From 5 to 10 years	12.5%	20.8%	62.5%	4.2%		100.0%
	From 10 to 15 years	17.6%	17.6%	47.1%	17.6%		100.0%
	From 15 to 20 years		22.2%	44.4%	11.1%	22.2%	100.0%
	Over 20 years			100.0%			100.0%
Total		20.8%	23.6%	44.4%	8.3%	2.8%	100.0%

Source: author's elaboration using SPSS

From the analysis of the link between *professional experience in local public administration system* and *the degree of autonomy in the function held* results that of the respondents who held professional experience up to 3 years, the majority (66.7%) says that someone else decides what to do and how to do at work. Among respondents with work experience of 3 to 5 years, most (40%) say that someone else decides what to do, but they decide how to do. Then, of respondents with work experience of 5 to 10 years, the majority (62.5%) believes that they have a certain freedom to decide what to do and how to do. Among respondents with experience of 10 to 15 years, about half (47.1%) say they have some freedom to decide what to do and how to do. Then, of respondents with experience of 15 to 20 years, most (44.4%) say they have some freedom to decide what to do and how to do. Among respondents with experience of over 20 years, all states that they have some freedom to decide what to do and how to do in exerting the function held.

These results reveal the existence of an association between professional experience and the degree of autonomy in the function held, meaning that respondents with more experience tend to declare that they have more autonomy, and those with less experience tend to declare that they have less autonomy in their function. Indeed, the ability to decide and act in the function performed is supported by professional experience in the field. In time, along with experience, also increases the ability of its owners in the function held, which gives them autonomy of decision and action.

However, results have indicated that the observed variables are associated to a point in the sense that although professional experience is very high (over 20 years), the degree of autonomy remains average (there is some freedom to decide what to do and how to do). This could be explained by the fact that most of the respondents (83.33%) are executives (see Figure 1). Thus, no matter how much professional experience they have, they exert their function following the

orders received from those in leadership positions. Therefore, it is hard to imagine that execution public servants decide themselves what to do and how to do in exerting their jobs.

Correlational Analysis of Professional Experience and Degree of Autonomy in the Function Held

Using the association table has provided information regarding the existence of relation between the variables analyzed, without showing us how strong the link is.

To overcome this difficulty we proceed to study the intensity of relation between research variables using correlation analysis.

Through the correlation analysis is identified, positioned and estimated the degrees of intensity of the links between phenomena or processes captured in the (co) relation, (co) dependency, and connection.⁶ Strictly speaking, the correlation is a measure of the intensity of the link between variables.⁷

To measure the “strength” of relation between research variables we used the indicator Pearson correlation coefficient.

To verify the hypothesis we started in the research conducted, namely “*The higher professional experience tends to increase the degree of autonomy in exercising the function held*”, we correlated the items related to these variables. The Pearson r correlation coefficients have the following values (see Table 7):

Table 7. Correlation between respondents' professional experience and the degree of autonomy in exerting the function held

Correlations			
		Which of the following statements best describes your situation in the function that you exert?	How many years have you been working in the local administration system?
Which of the following statements best describes your situation in the function that you exert?	Pearson Correlation	1	.457**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
	N	72	72
How many years have you been working in the local administration system?	Pearson Correlation	.457**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
	N	72	72

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Source: author's elaboration using SPSS

The data analysis summarized in the above table reveal that the variable *professional experience in local public administration system* is positively correlated with the variable *degree of autonomy in the exercise of the function held* ($r = 0.457$, $p < 0.001$). The professional experience of dignitaries and public servants from local public administration is higher, so they tend to declare that the degree of autonomy they have in exerting the function held is higher and vice

⁶ Zaiț, D., Spalanzani, A., *Cercetarea în economie și management, Repere epistemologice și metodologice*, Economică Publishing House, București, 2006, p. 184

⁷ Jaba, E., Grama, A., *Analiza statistică cu SPSS sub Windows*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2004, p. 233

versa. By reporting to the system of valorization proposed by Cohen⁸, the link between considered variables is of average intensity. Since the coefficient of determination is $R^2 = 0.20$, it follows that the two variables share 20% of the variation that characterize them.

I have formulated the null hypothesis and the alternative one as follows:

H_0 : There is no correlation between professional experience in local public administration system and the degree of autonomy in the exercise of the function held.

H_1 : There is correlation between professional experience in local public administration system and the degree of autonomy in the exercise of the function held.

$H_0: r = 0$ and $H_1: r \neq 0$

The t test relation is: $t_{calc} = \frac{r_{y_x} \sqrt{n-2}}{\sqrt{1-r_{y_x}^2}} = \frac{0,457\sqrt{72-2}}{\sqrt{1-0,457^2}} = 4,29$.

According to Student's t table for $72-2 = 70$ degrees of freedom and a significance level $\alpha = 0.01$, $t = 2.326$. It is noted that $t_{calc} = 4.29 > t_{tab} = 2.326$ in which case we rejected the null hypothesis. Therefore, we concluded that there is a significant link between the variables correlated, so the correlation coefficient is significant. The appropriate value of Sig., equal to 0.000, shows a significant coefficient of correlation, i.e. there is less than 1% chance of error if we assert that between the two variables exists a significant correlation.

In the graphics below, the correlation between the variables considered looks as follows: (see Figure 6):

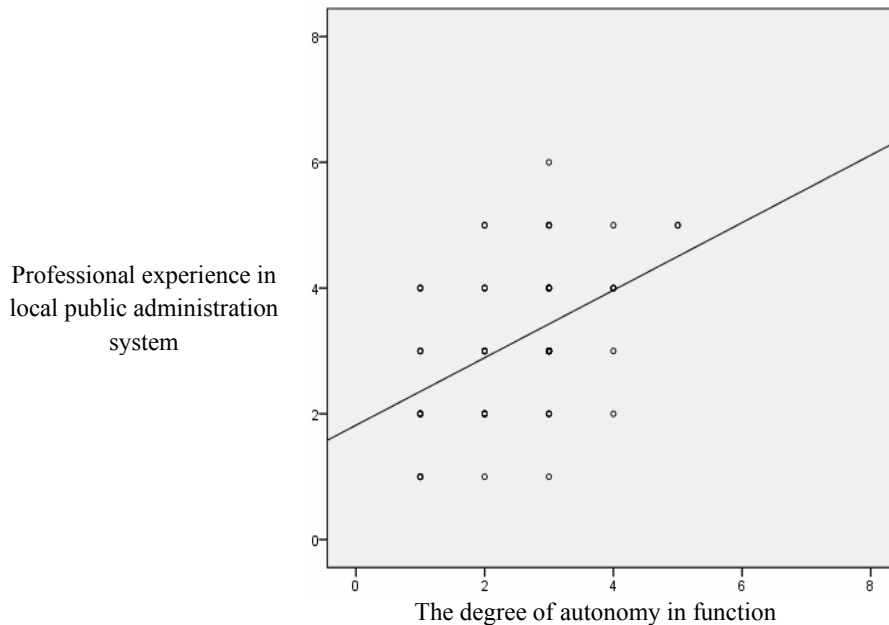


Fig. 6. Graphical representation of the link between professional experience of respondents dignitaries and public servants and the degree of autonomy in exerting the function held

Source: author's elaboration using SPSS

⁸Cohen attributes to the values of correlation coefficients, depending on their size, the following marks: values between 0.14 and 0.36 - weak correlation; values between 0.36 and 0.50 - average correlation; values between 0.50 and 1.00 - strong correlation.

Visualization of the chart correlation of professional experience of dignitaries and public servants in local public administration system and the degree of autonomy in the exercise of the function held suggests the link between these two variables. According to the graphic, the cloud of points is ascending upward, revealing the fact that the link between observed variables is positive.

Conclusions

Amid the research developed in this paper, we found a direct positive correlation of average intensity between the professional experience in the field and the degree of autonomy in the function held. The analysis undertaken by reference to the specific situation of local public administration in Suceava confirmed the hypothesis assumed in the research, respectively: the higher professional experience tends to increase the degree of autonomy in exercising the function held. In other words, a lower professional experience tends to be associated with a low degree of autonomy and a greater professional experience tends to be associated with a high degree of autonomy. This assertion is explained by the tendency for greater professional experience, its holders exerting skill, ability and surety in performing their duties, hence the ability to decide and act autonomously in their function.

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