THE BARRIERS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALITY SYSTEMS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
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OBJECTIVE: THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER IS TO PRESENT AN OVERVIEW OF VARIOUS QUALITY MANAGEMENT ISSUES (BARRIERS AND LIMITATIONS OF QUALITY SYSTEMS) IN POLISH PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION.

METHODS: IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVE, A LITERATURE REVIEW AND A CASE ORIENTED ANALYSIS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION OFFICES WERE DEVELOPED.


For a couple of years the interest of public administration institutions in quality management systems has been growing constantly. Currently the Polish public administration is one of the leaders in the processes of implementing quality systems according to ISO 9001:2000 standards. Quality management systems have been implemented in about 250 public administration offices. Among them there are town, city and commune offices, district authorities offices and provincial marshal’s offices, and – which should be especially highlighted – provincial offices, ministries, police headquarters and treasury offices.

These changes, however, need to be followed by a further process of improving the quality of services. Having taken the first step, i.e. having obtained the certification of quality management systems, it is necessary to move on immediately to the implementation of the principles of management by quality. For this purpose, self-evaluation models can be used, e.g. a model developed by the European Foundation for Quality Management.

The major objective of this paper is to present the major barriers and limitations in the functioning of implemented quality systems in public administration.

The lack of possibilities to apply the process approach

According to ISO 9001:2000 standards, the process approach should be included in a quality management system.
A good process is a process in which a customer gets involved as little as possible. The best option is when customers’ contacts with an institution are limited to “entries” and “exits”. A functional division of labour means that in practice it is very difficult to follow the principles of the process approach. After the implementation of a quality system it turns out that the process is carried out by many functional cells and/or positions. It is very difficult to identify, and especially integrate, such a process. The lack of the process approach is the major reason for the low quality of services (Bugdol, 2006). For example, currently the inhabitants of a land district are obliged to deal with two offices if they want to obtain a building permit – the district authorities office and the commune office (an extract from a land development plan – if such a plan exists – is issued by the commune office). A typical procedure of obtaining a building permit seems quite simple (Procedure, 2006). It consists of a few stages: filing an application, verifying the application’s completeness, initiating proceedings, supplementing missing documents, submitting information to interested parties, and preparing and receiving a decision. In the real world, all documents necessary to submit an application have to be obtained from various offices and institutions. The employees of district authorities offices know that a customer is not capable of dealing with all formal requirements at one place and at one time. Some district authorities offices help their customers themselves (e.g. by arranging agricultural land exemptions).

Legal limitations cause the simplification of processes, so crucial for the duration of procedures, to be unfeasible.

Some activities or consultations may not be disposed of.

**The unsatisfactory development of human resources management methods**

Public administration offices do not take full advantage of many human resources management methods. Only recently have local government offices implemented detailed regulations concerning the employment of their workers. Currently recruitment processes are open and competitive. (An amendment to the Local Government Employees Act – the uniform text of 2001; The Journal of Law, no. 142, item 1593, an amendment effective as of 7 August 2005). According to the regulations in force, all employees should undergo the process of evaluation (The Journal of Law no. 06.169.1201 of 25 August 2006), but in practice many public administration offices do not evaluate their employees at all. Even the regulation mentioned above provides for the worst possible method of employee evaluation – one carried out by a direct superior. The offices that have implemented quality systems should evaluate their personnel competencies. Unfortunately, such evaluation stops at the assessment of experience and verification of formal requirements concerning skills and competencies. Professional development of public administration officers constitutes a considerable problem. Training systems within the state administration are centralized. Local governments have more opportunities to help those employees who work on the improvement of their professional qualifications. Motivational systems leave a lot to be desired. The notion of “public service motivation” (Perry, Wise 1990, Perry 1997, Wright 2005) is just an empty platitude.

**The fashion for customer service offices**

It cannot be denied that the functioning of customer service offices should have a positive influence on the quality of services. But there is one basic condition for this. Before such an office is established all processes should be carefully analyzed, because it happens frequently that a customer service office becomes another “link in a process chain” causing the time for serving a customer to grow longer. An office becomes an obstacle on the way to achieving direct contact with a competent officer. The functioning of such offices has to be based on the principle according to which a customer is completely free of any obligations (except for an obligation to submit
an application and receive a decision). All other activities are performed by an officer. The problem is that officers sometimes lack adequate competencies and are forced by circumstances to get in touch with competent employees of particular services or organizational units. Thus customer service offices are often such offices in name only.

A different (positive) role can be played by information offices. They are responsible for providing customers with information on how to use a particular service. Their major function is to explain to customers the legal complexities of various time-consuming processes.

Customer service offices do not limit corruption. Many studies show that bureaucracy and first of all complicated procedures are the reasons for much unethical behaviour. Many scholars and practitioners (M. Armstrong, 2000) have noticed an interesting regularity. The existence of customer service offices gives the impression that customer service quality is the responsibility of people working in them, and not all employees. It is obviously contrary to the principles of quality management and may lead to negative changes in professional attitudes, personal interactions and social relations.

**Changeability of management styles**
The changeability of management styles, concepts and principles is directly related to political changes occurring within the power structure. Each consecutive mayor attempts to introduce his own management style. Unfortunately, the knowledge of modern management methods and concepts among local government leaders is not too impressive. As a matter of fact, local government administrations include the function of a (district or commune) secretary, but the influence of such secretaries upon current management is frequently too small. Changes also occur within local government councils, and this is a natural process. It should be noted, however, that councilors also exert considerable influence on the functioning of offices. In many cases they make decisions concerning employment, training policy or criteria for the evaluation and dismissal of employees. (In Poland, only the employees of city and commune offices have the status of tenured officers.)

**Badly designed Quality Systems**
The management systems analyzed based on the ISO 9001:2000 standard have been implemented since 1999. Despite many positive changes triggered by them (mainly an increase of quality awareness), it is obvious that these systems are frequently improperly designed. It has already been mentioned here that the complete process approach cannot be applied there. On the other hand, badly identified processes occur too often. Decisions concerning the implementation of quality systems are not strategic (councils question the legitimacy of their introduction). Many offices have a great number of documented procedures and instructions. It does not help employees to understand the functionality of quality systems. It happens sometimes that quality systems are unusually centralized and imposed by consultants or executive bodies. Too little attention is paid to corrective and preventive action, quality tools are not adequately utilized, and quality reviews become yet another burdensome duty.

**Conclusions**
1. The barriers and limitations mentioned do not indicate that quality management systems should not be implemented in public administration. In fact, the opposite is true. Quality systems are indispensable because they can move us closer to the holistic implications of management concepts. Quality systems allow
us to appreciate the significance of corporate governance, human resources management processes, and orientation towards meeting customers’ needs and requirements.

2. The improvement of the quality of services in public administration should start with educational and recruitment processes. It is necessary to quickly implement many methods of human resources management.

3. The idea of large districts should be revived because the centralization of services is necessary. A customer should be involved in a service process only at the stages of entry and exit.

4. Many legal regulations concerning public administration employees should be amended. A pressing problem is amending the Public Procurement Act. It blocks not only quality improvement, but also the strengthening of the social capital of local communities.

5. Quality improvement is confronted with many barriers and limitations. They are inherent in every social, economic, organizational, legal and technical system. The barriers mentioned above should be treated as “informative examples”.

Works Cited:

8. Procedura Starostwa Powiatowego PJ-P-02.( 2006)