

QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF SERVICES OF LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Senior lecturer Ph.D. Elena Vaculovschi

Academy of Economic Studies, Chişinău, Republic of Moldova

E-mail: evaculovschi@mail.md

Senior lecturer Ph.D. Oxana Savciuc

Academy of Economic Studies, Chişinău, Republic of Moldova

E-mail: ox_savciuc@hotmail.com

Abstract

One of the requirements to improve the services performed by the local public administration in the Republic of Moldova is the strategic approach of its activity. In order to enhance the local public administration efficiency, there has been created the appropriate institutional and legal framework. Even though the corresponding laws and regulations have taken into consideration the relevant European norms, their correct implementation is essential for their functionality. For this purpose, it is necessary to provide opportunities for further training of the local public clerks within a consolidated system of professional instruction, refreshment and specialization. This strategy founds a continuing instruction of

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One of the requirements to improve the services performed by the local public administration and the consolidation of the activities of the Republic of Moldova authorities is the strategic and final approach of its activity. Such a method is, practically, missing. Thus, upon independence declaration of the Republic of Moldova, the local public administration went under several totally opposing reforms. And the last one, ratified in 2003, lead to the administrative-regional configuration tracking the principle in force in the period of the initial independence of the Republic of Moldova. Practically, these reforms did not contribute at all to the increase of the local public administration efficiency and, currently, the local public administration organisms have limited capabilities to efficiently administer the finances, patrimony and the human resources. As a result, the quality of the public services to be performed leave much to be desired.

Recently, the Government of the Republic of Moldova has initiated a new wave of reforms. Thus, in 2006, in order to enhance the efficiency of the local public administration, there was created the appropriate institutional and legal framework. More specific, the Department of Local Public Administration was constituted and there was ratified a package of laws (Law regarding the local public administration in new format, Law regarding the administrative decentralization and the Law regarding the regional development) that came into effect in 2007. The work is still in progress for drafting and implementing a single mechanism of documents circulation within the system of the public administration, which would also assure the control upon the decisions execution. For this chapter, the Government examines the Conception of the electronic governing, as well as the approval of a decision related to the official websites of the public administration authorities, the drafting of the edicts on the public services, the public clerk status, the Code of Conduct of the public clerk.

The Code of Conduct of the public clerk is now part of a package of legislative documents with the purpose of improving the quality of the public service in the Republic of Moldova. The drafting of the Code of Conduct is mentioned in the Reform Strategy of the central public administration, ratified by the Government on December 20, 2005 and it derives from the ONU Convention. The Code of Conduct of the public clerk has the goal to establish and maintain high professional standards in the public services and to inform the citizens about the conduct that they are entitled to and should expect from the public clerks. At the same time, this Code will contribute to eliminate the red tape and the corruption deeds in the public administration, at all levels. It regulates the norms of clerks conduct in compliance with the principles of fairness, professionalism, loyalty, integrity, etc.

Even though the above laws and regulations have taken into consideration the European practices in the field, their correct implementation is a requirement to promote the local autonomy and to consolidate the communities. Consequently, there would be a need to separate the functions and the duties between the central and the local authorities – to have the latter become more autonomous – and, thus, it is essential to increase the financial and economic independence of the local public administration organisms, and still the most important: providing the local public clerks with opportunities of advancement within a consolidated system of professional training, requalification and advancement. Here, the RM Government recommends to make sure that there is implemented the National Strategy Training of public clerks and local authorities, drafted in compliance with the recommendations issued by the Europe Council. This strategy founds the continuing education for the clerks and the local authorities of the local public administration in order to increase their competencies, performances and competitiveness.

In this context, the application of the principles of the Total Management of Quality in Public Administration and Services will even lead to a greater efficiency and more competitive results.

The idea of introduction some techniques of quality administration for improving the organization management originates in the industrial sector. But whatever was characteristic only to the organizations productive in nature, it may be applied today in the services companies. But this thing involves a series of difficulties, since a service is not a tangible asset, it may be produced right in the moment of performance towards the client, and the measurement of its qualities is a complex matter and can only be done upon the client's arrival.

The introduction of the Total Management of Quality in Public Administration and Services model involves a higher level of difficulty, since the concept of client, a priority in the modern approach of quality "client satisfaction" differs in meaning in the public space and the private space.

The client of the public administration and services is the citizen, who establishes various types of relations with public organizations, with a different and complex role. Thus, he will sometimes request from the Administration to guarantee his rights; other times, his interest will be that the Administration performs some services for him. Interests may be contradictory in some moments, for example when it comes to collecting services or obtaining an operation permit. In addition, the citizen finds himself in the impossibility to choose. This limitation of his capacity of selecting makes him a special client, losing a (specific) characteristic that belongs to the private companies.

Another special element is the fact that the citizen, besides being a client, is the one who supports the public administrations by taxes, so he is their owner to a certain extent. So, we can easily attach to the citizen, related to his relations with the Public Administration organisms the notion of "internal client".

The fundamental principles influence the quality of services in the Public Administration may be the following:

- citizens take part in decisions or are being consulted about the level and the type of the performed services;
- citizens are informed about the level and the type of the services to be performed/provided;
- citizens may hope, in a reasonable way, to reach to that type of service;
- citizens may select among services providers who will present their offers;
- citizens may draft various claims when the service fails the wanted standards;

- the service provider companies set up the quality objectives and have the means to attain them;
- the public administrations initiate modifications that turn the citizen the initial point of their services;
- the formation and specialization of the personnel who is to work in direct contact with the public; fundamental aspect for the taxpayer should be the professionalism and the ethics of the Public Service.

In light of the above, it is an obvious conclusion that there should be adjust the Quality Management to the specific characteristics of the Administrators and Public Services and not to perform an automatic transposition of the methods being used in the private sector.

The implementation of the Total Management of Quality in Public Administration and Services may play a quite important role. Thus, there can be singled out 5 fundamental aspects that support the application of such system:

1. The economic aspect

The public administrations (central and local) have an important role in the world economy. Anyway, they represent ½ out of GDP in most countries in Europe. The public administrations that act pursuant to the criteria of the Total Quality will constitute a model, emphasizing cultural values to stimulate the search for efficiency and quality in other environments than the strictly public ones.

2. The limited resources aspect

The limited resources, the fiscal crisis and the attempt to reduce the public deficit will impose a correct administration of them. On the other hand, the citizen is more and more exigent, both for the quality of the public services, and the fees administration, which he pays under various forms. It is required a higher quality, but it is evident the deficit of the available means.

3. The aspect of compliance with the democratic values

Once there has been established the equality of rights and indicators before the laws, the emphasis of the democratic values will presuppose the correlation of the state activity and the public administrations with the social requests and needs.

The responsibility of the public organizations should strive for an additional objective of some appropriate public plans, coming to terms with the idea of improving the services at a lower price.

Within the current concept of quality, the citizen who uses the public services is the protagonist (the one who makes assessments) and each action should consider his expectations, requirements and needs. The quality of the various public services is to be

evaluated by the citizen, who ultimately will become the authentic judge of the services quality.

Also, the society, the citizens are the ones who really dictate the standards of public services, assess their performance and, thus, reaffirm the democratic values. Hence the implicit condition that the different measures to increase the democratic responsibility of the political leaders, since they should admit themselves the large range of the actors who should be actively involved into the evaluation of the public programs.

4. The aspect of the citizens' expectations

Lately, along with the increase of the population number, there has also evolved the relation that a citizen may have with the state and the public administrations. He transfers from the condition of beneficiary to the one of a judge who has rights and claims to get certain services and performances. The citizen is more and more informed, enjoys a higher cultural level and is more aware that he supports the state and the administrations by his taxes (indirect or direct), and that is the reason why he expects an answer to his requirements. The society puts a pressure so that the administrations handle their resources more rationally and drive their activity towards fulfilling its necessities (the society's).

It is essential for the administration to determine the necessary and the expectations of the citizens in order to set up the policies that will permit their fulfilment, so that will be able to face the challenge of a society more and more demanding, aware of its rights and with the capacity of selection.

5. The image of the public sector

Nowadays, there is a tendency to believe that the public area is ineffective, and consequently loses the vote of trust from the society, which reasons it by the contrast between the expectations regarding the existent productivity in the private and public organizations. In the former case, these tend to be specific and stable from the point of view of setting its own objectives, while for the latter, the political changes may trigger disruptions in the plans designed to reach the objectives and even within the objectives themselves. Very often, there is seen an exaggeration regarding the mistakes made in a service performed within the Public Administration. For example, if a client is treated in a quite inappropriate way or he is not satisfied with a product from a company, it is not a rule to generalize the malfunction to the other companies in the branch and, of course, to the totality of the private enterprises. This thing will happen, instead, when the respective relation is being established with an administration (public, local, etc).

The above is logic in its most part, taking into account that the administrations are supported from the citizens' taxes. Hence, the surging level of exigency and its variety.

This matter should draw the attention upon the fact that each and every organism of the Public Administration displays a positive image as possible, not only for its own prestige but also for the recognition of the merits of other administrations.

In order to change the critical and negative public opinion that is present in the society regarding to the organizations belonging to the public administration, it is imperative an increase of the productivity and quality of the public services to make them competitive for the instances when they compete against the private companies (health, education, etc).

We may state that, in general, the methodologies involved in the quality management is taking very much care of this matter, thus allowing forming a correlation with the necessities, as well an improvement of the administration as a philosophy and method.

Even for the private sector, most of the companies face difficulties in TQM implementation. The consultancy companies surveys show that only 20-36% of the companies that have attempted the TQM application have reached improvement either significant or tangible, in the quality department, productivity, competitiveness or financial lucrativeness. But most TQM efforts are missing three inter-dependent elements: Strategy, Structure and Sinergy.

- *Strategy* – the total quality management should be integrated with the general mission, objectives and plans of the company. For most cases, this does not happen. Thus, within the Local Public Administrations, TQM may be reflected in the strategic elements of the organization. It will become an essential part of the work strategy which will be accepted and supported by the top management. This is a link that usually is absent.

- *Structure* – most of the companies tend to make their organization structures more efficient, by lowering the administration levels, elimination of the confirmations in excess, the reduction of the barriers between the departments and the work teams. In spite of this, there are more common barriers, which hinder the TQM implementation process, such as: the goals and the objectives that conflict with each other and the inappropriate resources.

- *Synergy* – the organizational efficiency is reduced by the internal conflicts and opportunism. Synergy takes place when the individuals, department and the management levels cooperate and help each other. Thus, each of them should join itself in the common team in order to reach successful heights.

The introduction of a system of the Total Quality Management needs to be the consequence of a decision of the top leadership. In the Public Administration, this is a decision that corresponds to the political people. This decision is usually the consequence of the proposals of an organization group.

The arguments that support the idea of introduction the Total Quality Management is based on:

1. *Expenses reduction.* The least necessary to repeat a thing and least time used in serving the clients, the better the optimization of the resources usage and more possible to use the surplus towards other purposes.

2. *Income increase.* The satisfied clients will tend more to using the service or the product that is being offered to them. For the Public Administration, maybe, there are expected fewer delays for the tax payments.

3. *Productivity increase.* If quality provided, the productivity goes higher, hence the number of repeats goes lower, with the correct and more efficient usage of the resources.

4. *Image improvement.* The better the service, the better the image. There will be a tendency of increasing the number of transactions or the utilizing the same offered by the Administration, without appealing to the alternative services or processes.

5. *Competitiveness increase.* A better image and some cost lowering triggers the competitiveness growth. The same effect benefits from the society in its entirety. Examples like Postal Services, Health, Education, Social Security, Police; moreover, a public service (like the ones above) is totally or partially substituted for by private companies which, in many cases, are contracted by people or entities that create the public service, very ineffectively or inappropriately.

6. *Improvement of the environment where clerks develop their activities.* The culture of the total quality makes that the better performance at the Public Administration be considered a mutual objective. The continuing improvement is only obtained by the personnel cooperation and training. The workplaces designing will be done by taking into consideration the latest knowledge related to motivation and the leader quality.

7. *Proactive status.* A better planning allows the efforts concentration in order to solve more important problems and shrinks the time dedicated to “fire extinguish”. For most cases, the quality improvement leads to consumption decrease.

Once it is obtained the support of the management to start the organization administration in compliance with the Total Quality Management model, it is imperative to notify the personnel, with the largest amplitude possible, about the methods that are going to be introduced and the fact that the improvement will be higher should the employees pay more attention to it. A seminar about the landmarks of the Total Quality Management may be a good starting point, whenever a more influent management person takes part in it, such top leaders, supervisors and the union representatives.

The introduction of the Total Quality Management does not mean the same thing with the parting with the chart of a new structure and training, which by a radical change, will increase the efficiency and enhances the company image. On the contrary, it is brought into discussion the existence of an excellence, far-fetched but accessible, and the steps that are

supposed to be taken to reach this excellence are the ones that are suggested by the model administration fundamental theories. Even in the same organism, there may be important mismatches between the departments and the sections that relate to the degree of excellence. The main thing is that any situation may be improved and all efforts should be focused towards this improvement.

The first steps always start from drafting a diagnosis in which it is preferable to separate:

- the control of quality or the verification if the services fulfil some characteristics previously set up;
- the quality insurance or the verification of the method in which the rules already set in the organization are complied with and the analysis of the processes that are developing within its limits;
- the Total Quality Management or the search for excellence by means of the continuing improvement, based on a training exchange of the organization.

It is really important to teach the departments to perform the diagnosis process.

It will always be necessary to perform an initial diagnosis, but an organization that strives for the improvement will have to diagnose quickly, maybe every day.

Once done the first diagnosis, it is recommended to create four groups:

1. *Council of Quality*

This will include the company general manager, the quality control manager, the most representative managers of the other departments and the personnel agents. Its duties are the following:

- setting up the policies in terms of quality;
- teaching the awareness about the fact that the quality is a key component in the strategy of the Government, Department or the Public Organism being scrutinized;
- insuring that all the quality aspects are systematically treated;
- boosting the quality initiatives development, by supporting and approving them;
- approving the projects of improvement that are being suggested;
- knowledge of the norms of the groups that project and the ones that deal the improvement;
- identification of the necessities for resources to continue the improvement and the repeat of their identification, if needed;
- impelling the personnel formation.

2. *The Department of Quality Insurance*

It has the duties below:

- the formation, for the other departments or sectors of organism, of the methods and knowledge related to the quality administration;
- creation and spreading the necessary information that will successfully perform the diagnosis and the quality plan and cooperation with the other sectors for its introduction and development;
- creation, along with the other sectors, of several manuals regarding quality;
- contribution to defining the standards and indicators and the drafting of the quality control panels;
- contribution to formation of some groups that target the improvement and to promote the *natural groups* (as it called the group made of the boss and his closest co-workers);
- participation in all the organisms' actions that have connection with quality;
- proposals of the Council of Quality according to giving awards to the departments or sectors that have done excellent work;
- contribution to the distribution of all the quality-related material to the entire organization;
- participation in seminars, congresses and any type of reunions that handle the quality issues.

3. *Projecting groups*. The groups who project include clerks that belong to the departments influenced by a project desired to be implemented. They are, consequently, inter-functional. Their role resides in the continuing the policy adopted by the Total Quality Management.

4. *Improvement groups (of service)*. They are made up of a small number of people, generally between three and nine, which have the mission to analyze a concrete issue of the organization and to propose a solution for it. The members belong to different departments or sectors that are being affected by that issue. Among the group members, there is one called 'Facilitator', whose goal is to instruct the others in using the quality tools, as well as the group work techniques. The "Facilitator" does not belong to any of the affected departments and is the person highly trained for this job.

The steps that may be followed depend, in any case, of the situation of every organization. It is necessary to stress that the introduction of the Total Quality Management is not being forced into the process. The entire personnel should accept the new theories, a new way of reaching their goals and this requires some time and does not go anywhere if imposed. Only if these theories are accepted, there are possibilities to reach excellence. At the same time, quality is the result of the daily efforts of everybody and the mere revision of some administrative proceedings will not help obtain the desired objective.

As far as the local organisms are concerned, we may say that they possess certain characteristics that make them very permeable to the implementation of the new administration methods. In this sense, there could be enumerated a series of reasons that make possible and sometimes even necessary, the implementation of the changes that relate to the administration manner:

- the City Halls are part of a market environment, more than any other administration. The public services and the life quality that they are offering are elements that help the citizens make the difference between municipalities;

- there is a great competition among municipalities. They compete in obtaining resources and attract investments. Each local public organization needs to perform a strategic analysis in order to set up the bases that will allow to locate itself in a position that will enable to obtain advantages and offer the citizens, current or potential, a high quality life and economic welfare;

- they have a more direct contact with the citizen. He may take part and influence more directly than upon other administrations;

- the activity and services that are being performed are in direct and unrestricted contact with the citizen. The traffic, public transportation, street cleaning, noise, lighting, landscape, etc., and anything that has connections with the everyday life of citizens, along with other elements, such as social services, education, etc that turn the municipality a provider for services to the citizen;

- in addition, the presence of a greater organizational flexibility in the local administrations makes it easier the change in the monitoring and implementation of the new models.

The administration and the policy for quality increase in the Public Administration service is complemented by the ISO 9004-2 norm "Guide for Services", emphasizing these aspects that are specific to the Total Quality Management. We can enumerate:

- focus on the process that defines the so-called supply chain;
- continuous quality improvement by means of the processes improvement;
- the importance of the leader capacity, values, of the communication in obtaining the quality;

- methodology for improvement, based on participation, the finding of possible failure causes, the analysis of causes and implementation of the corrective actions.

As a conclusion of the above, we make a summary of the steps to be followed to implement the Total Quality Management:

- management approval;
- creation of the commission and of the quality administration department;

- drafting strategies and policies;
- selecting the excellence model;
- drafting the necessary documents for pre-diagnosis.

The quality of the services performed by the clerks should not be thought of as a goal in itself, but as a consequence of the quality of the entire activity of the Public Administration, the quality of the personnel hired, of the system of organization and management and quality of relations between the citizens and clerks.

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