Public sector quality based on standards in public sector offices

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One of the American writers, Robert Prisinik refers to the quality in following way:
Quality … you know what it is but at the same time you don’t. This is a contradiction. However some things are better than others, that means, they have better quality. But when you try to say, what the quality is, not to mention specific things, everything washes away. If nobody knows what it is, then from the practical point of view it does not exist. But from the practice you know it does exist. What are the degrees based on? Why would people pay a fortune for one thing and reject others? There is no doubt that certain things – goods and services are better than the others.” ¹

Following the Polish language dictionary quality is „feature, kind, class; a group of attributes which constitutes that certain object is that object and not another.” ²

The Oxford Dictionary for the Business Word defines quality as „a level of perfection”. Other authors distinguish five categories of quality definitions: ³

- quality= uniqueness, perfection
- quality = perfection (lack of mistakes)
- quality = efficiency in accomplishing an objective – a mission and the client in the centre of attention
- quality = financial value
- quality = transformation⁴

¹ E. Wnuk-Lipińska, Jakość w szkolnictwie wyższym - mechanizmy oceny, „Nauka i Szkolnictwo Wyższe, nr 1, 1993 r., za R. A. Prising
² Słownik języka polskiego tom I, Warszawa 1995 r., s. 769
The definitions which are mentioned above are universal. While defining quality of service we have to remember about features which differ them from products.

The most important among them are: immateriality, unseparateness of production and consumption process, unhomogeneity (unstable quality).

Quality, often associates with certain standard, with something certain, service or product, which comes up to our expectations. We are fully aware what we might receive.

When I think of quality term, comparison with McDonald’s chain restaurants comes to my mind. No matter if I am in Warsaw, New York, Moscow or smaller city, when I show up in one of these restaurants I know what to expect. Hamburger always tastes the same, in each restaurants the menu is similar and permanent. Customer service, called front desk will greet us with a smile and say the same phrase which will encourage us to buy a larger portion of Mc’ set. There is no trouble to distinguish the staff: there are different uniforms for management, different for people preparing meals, and other for serving customers and for cleaners.

Restaurants are clean and neat, the service is fast and skilful. Can you have any other demands about fast food restaurant? Comparing restaurant with administration activity may seem trivial, however, customers’ expectations are very similar – time of service, reliability, facing customers’ expectations.

Through many years public administration was treated completely different than private sector,. Everything what would be unacceptable on free market got away in administration – slowness, inefficiency, low quality of service, bad customer service, lack of information, not mentioning promotion.
One way of avoiding and limiting these unfavorable elements in public administration more and more often standards of quality from private sector are introduced.

There are many concepts of quality management. Starting from perfection model EFQM, through ISO 9000 and 9001 standards and finishing with Total Quality Management - TQM.

EFQM model was created by European Foundation for Quality Management – TFQM. That model is very close to TQM concept and distinguishes four results of quality politics. The most significant result is to achieve intended aims and compare to others. The results also contain financial and non financial outcomes: profits, transactions, shares (participation) on the market, ability to introduce new products on the market, number of faults. There are some other outcomes connected with these, however separately classified such as: “employees satisfaction” “customers satisfaction”, influence on society”. In order to achieve those results, model establishes five factors which enable this: leadership, human resources management, strategy and politics, resources and process. Defining these criteria, of course, mainly depends on a kind of institution which is supposed to use this model.5

One model of analyzing quality of service is worked out by, so called: Nordic school.6 In this model quality of service is perceived as the effect of comparison of received service with expected one. Relations between the company – party which performs service and the customer are particularly important. Technical result of service, called as technical quality is evaluated as well as manner in which service is provided known as functional quality.

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5 The Local Government Management Bard. Quality in Local Government, Next Steps, LGMB, United Kingdom 1997 r., s. 73.
6 Ch. Grönroos, A service quality model and its marketing implications, European Jurnal of Marketing”, No 4, 1984 r.
Authors of this model made an assumption that there are five gaps between evaluation of service quality and customer’s expectations.

gap 1 – between quality evaluation made by service provider and purchaser expectations (does the company management know the expectations?)
gap 2 – between management perception and quality term (has the standard been established?)
gap 3 – between standards of quality and standards of service which is provided (is the staff prepared to handle the standards?) fact the standards exist does not guarantee their fulfillment
gap 4 – between the standard of service which is provided and their presentation outside (is created image of service appropriate?)
gap 5 – between service received and expected (does the consumer perceive quality of service properly?)

Authors state that gaps arise because of following reasons:

Gap 1
- inappropriate choice of marketing researches
- communication directed to the head
- excessive number of management levels

Gap 2
- insufficient staff commitment to achieve high quality
- setting goals improperly
- excessive standardization of tasks
- not noticing possibilities of fulfillment

Gap 3
- lack of group work
- inapplicability of employees to the work performed
- bad choice of technologies
- inappropriate system of supervising processes
- lack of adequate evaluation system of gratification
- roles collision

Gap 4

- vertical communication
- tendency to excessive promises

ISO International Organization for Standardization is non governmental organization which makes a chain of national normalization institutes in 148 countries based on one representative from each country with its centre in Geneva, working for the benefit of public and private sector. Members of ISO are representatives of institutions which belong to government structures, as well as representatives of private sector. It creates directives regarding shape of the system which guarantees quality and presents criteria of demands which need to be faced.\(^7\)

ISO 9000 and 9001 standards belong to standards of quality management. They are elements of the approach which says about constant improvement. They are often the first stage of introducing quality and they precede introducing TQM. Federal institution in USA defines TQM – total Quality Management as extensive system of management concentrated on a customer in order to improve quality of service and products.

This is the way of managing public institution on all levels, from management to front line workers in order to achieve customer satisfaction. Engagement of all workers is

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particularly important in this model as well as permanent improvement of working processes inside of public institution.

Nowadays standards of service quality is used more commonly – known as ISP 9000 and 9001 – not only for companies but for offices as well. Getting such standard demands fundamental changes in the area of office management, which becomes functional and more friendly to the customer.

First Office In which ISO quality standards were introduced was city office in Dzierżoniów in 1999. A few months later city office in Kwidzyń received certificate of ISO 9001. In August 2000 certificate first district got the certificate – raciborski district. Two large cities Bielsko Biała and Gliwice joined to Dzierżoniów and Kwidzyń.

In 1991 after introducing the administrative reform program „quality managing in public administration” was created. It was made by Umbrella project (currently association of umbrella consultants) in cooperation with Prime Minster office and Ministry of Public Affairs and Adminstartion. A year later ISO standards were introduced in city office in Kwidzyń and Poviat Starosty in Raciborz.8

Since few years we can notice more and more interest in quality management system in public administration. Presently Polish administration is a leader in process of introducing quality systems according to standards of ISO 9001:2000.

Systems of quality management are currently introduced in about 2000 of public administration offices.9 Among offices introducing quality standards are: city and parish offices, Poviat Starosties and marshal offices as well as government administration offices – provincial police station, tax offices.

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8 M. Bugdol, T. Krawczyk, Ocena systemu zarządzania jakością w administracji publicznej, Samorząd Terytorialny nr 6, 2005 r., s. 33.
9 M. Bugdol, Barieriy ograniczenia funkcjonowania systemów zarządzania jakością w administracji publicznej, Samorząd Terytorialny nr12, 2006 r., s. 65
ISO 9001:2000 processes are based on following pillars:

**Management responsibility** (organization, system and control)

**Human resource management** (qualifications of employees, practical training)

**Process management** (processes connected with the customer)

**Measurement, analysis and improvement** (system measurement and customer satisfaction)

It can be assumed that conditions of introducing ISO standards effectively are as follows:

- Direct engagement of Chief management in introducing quality system.
- Creating favorable atmosphere for quality system, which releases motivation to increase quality of service.
- Diagnosis of strong and weak points of the office and objective evaluation of the situation.
- Adequate preparation of management staff in range of proper organization in introducing quality system.
- Including total number of employees to accomplish quality system.
- Working out and introducing effective system of motivation for workers, which will convince them to full involvement in introducing quality system.

Reasons and effects of introducing quality standards ISO can be presented on specific examples. Offices of public administration in Bialystok which introduced ISO standards 9001:2000 were treated as research material. Different offices which perform discrepant services in public administration area were taken into consideration:

1. Podlaski Voivodship Office in Bialystok,
2. Poviat Office in Bialystok
Chosen offices provide various services to podlaskie residents. Among them there is office of
government administration: Podlaski Voivodship Office in Bialystok as well as office of
local administration Poviat Office in Bialystok. In spite of varied role which these offices
play, there are many similarities in their functioning connected with providing service based
on quality standards.

Podlaski Voivodship Office in Bialystok

Podlaski Voivodship Office in Bialystok has the certificate of quality system number
1112/1/2003 given by Polish centre of researches and certification – a joint stock company in
Warsaw from 30th December 2003 to 29th December 2006. The certificate confirms
accomplishing requirements of PN - EN ISO 9001:2001 standard by Podlaski Voivodship
Office in Bialystok.

In September 2002 Voivodship governor made a decision about establishing, introducing and
improving system of quality management according to polish standard ISO 9001:2001 in
Podlaski Voivodship Office in Bialystok. In the same year number of trainings for
management staff as well as for workers were taken place. 73 people including 25 inner
auditors were trained and they were given certificates which entitle them to conduct an audit
in the office.

Basic document under the standard, which was established in the office was quality politics. It
was also the first elaborated document, which determined goals and directions which the
office accepted to realization. This document describes system of quality management
introduced in the office. It presents vision and strategy of the office which is:

Podlaski Voivodship Office in Bialystok serves society standing on guard of public
interest and accomplishing tasks based on law.

Quality politics includes also six basic obligations:
• **Assurance of complete information** about the way of dealing matters in the office

• **Precise, in due time and neutral handling matters.** Appropriate staff recruitment with proper qualification and numerous workers trainings are used to fulfill these obligation.

• **Obligation to treat customers with respect and in friendly manner** (local conditions and substantive preparation of the staff)

• **Establishing such procedures which ensure skillful tasks fulfillment** (interest in various programs which are used to institutional development, creating and introducing by society politics department a program called permanent cooperation forum with local governments units and institutions of civil society.)

• **Fifth and sixth obligation** refer to workers because proper functioning of quality management depends on them.

Introducing the system is based on an important document, so called quality book. It includes description of connection between processes, directions of information flow. It lists resources which the office should have in order to introduce system of quality management. The book also has a register of trials taking place in the office; there are 250 of them. It is important that each defined trial in the office has it own information card. Such card is necessary to monitor the trials.

Another activity which is focused on pro quality actions is creating electronic circulation of documents.

Effective management of correspondence through its electronic register allows to gain quickly a lot of information about registered matters. Program guarantees efficient distribution of letters to individual receivers. It allows the director to establish where the letter is presently located and shows the way of letters flow which came in to the department or were decreed. It also allows to check **deadlines** for dealing with matters by each working position.
New website of the Office includes all the information which are necessary to individual customers as well to institutional in order to improve contact with the office, to approach government administration tasks and help in handling matters.

The answer to the standard requirement was also creating Customer Service office in October 2002. its tasks are:

a/ giving information about the way of dealing with a matter to customers who turn up to the office

b/ giving access to information cards, patterns to applications and forms

c/ receiving documents which are handed by customers, including complaints, applications and requests

d/ giving information about authority competent for matters which are not voivodship governor related

e/ maintaining and developing website of the office

f/ functioning of Public Information Bulletin

g/ creating by civil service office a guidebook about public administration

h/ keeping registry of customers who come to the management office in the day the client was seen

In the range of BOK’s activities following matters are excluded:

1/ foreigners and citizenship

2/ passports (including haste)

3/ control of employment legality

4/ administrative trials

What is more, there are matters in the range of the office service which are excluded to be done immediately regarding:

1/ the right to geological information
There is no doubt that customer service office is an image of the institution, that is why standards of the customer service should be strongly emphasized. In podlaski voivodship office following things are considered to be the most important:

- **Respect for the customer** – treating the customer as an important person, individual approach to each person, patience, treating customer’s problems and matters seriously, ability to apologize if needed, respecting customer’s time

- **Kindness** – good attitude, treating customers with fondness, creating nice atmosphere, putting yourself in customer situation, flexibility in action, kind approach to customer’s needs and problems

- **Responsibility** – involvement in dealing with customer’s matter, not sending him to other people, not leaving without support, cooperation

- **Professionalism** – excellent knowledge of procedures and tasks (expert knowledge), ability to give complete information, effectiveness in actions, ability to give advice, taking care of customer satisfaction

- **Obeying to high standards of self culture** – good manners, polite and tactful behavior, adequate outfit,

- **Availability** – matching working hours to customers needs, quick phone answering, quick responding to customer problems, availability

The assumptions above have their reflection in practice as:

**ORGANIZATIONAL STANDARDS:**
• Showing interest to the customer – giving priority to current customer service over other office work
• Customer service given by two people – stable staff of BOK consisting of at least two people
• Monitoring of strain of customer service positions – additional support of service by calling a person from the register who is the most helpful at that time
• Lengthening of working hours for BOK – on Mondays office is opened until 5 p.m
• Researches on customer’s satisfaction – a questionnaire in electronic and paper version

There were also done communication and image standards. Listed element were considered as the most important:

Marking places for customer service – each point, place for customer service should be marked in visible way, neatly and legibly

Marking room doors with plates – name of the department, name of the inner organizational unit and names and surnames of people who work there

Marking with plates contents of closed areas – enumerate organizational units which are in closed area

Marking places where complaints and request are taken – the room must be distinctly marked “complaints and requests applications receiving”

Social conditions and their accessibility for the customer – free cloakroom, telephone box with access to local phone calls, toilets, newsagent’s, buffet

Wearing identification badges by office workers – obligation of wearing identification badges in the office area, in noticeable way, at a height of a heart

Worker’s outfit – BOK – men: long trousers and a jacket, women: jackets, dresses or skirts in moderate length or trousers; shoes and pumps have to be worn with these clothes.
It is important that specific needs of disabled people have been noticed, clients of the office. It was acknowledged that providing a service to a disabled customer in the place of his arrival is significant. The office was adapted to disabled people, architectural barriers were liquidated and friendly conditions were created, e.g.: parking places were marked, fittings and equipment in toilets.

Standards of access to information were also worked out. Info line was introduced, the telephone which connects directly with customer service office, open during office working hours. In BOK one computer with a printer was available to customer usage.

The office website was divided to domains with following departments: civil affairs and migration, social politics, management of European funds office. There were also introduced so called: office machines – twenty – four – hour access to internet pages of the office and BIP.

The office also accepted the obligation coming from quality politics. Constant improvement in order to guarantee proper quality of services which are provided to our customers.

- self improvement, as a duty of each worker
- increasing qualifications and professional skills by trainings, post graduation studies and other form of education
- Foreign language studies – as a priority in training plan, financial support for language courses and studying in convenient time for worker (also during working hours)

Next office, which changes due to introducing ISO quality standards a would like to presents is Poviat Office in Bialystok.

From 9 to 10 July 2006 the office had a certification audit made by accredited in polish centre of accreditation, authorized and independent unit, that is by polish ship register a joint stock
company. A decision from 21st June 2006 was a result of conformity of established quality management system with ISO requirements 9001:2000, which is confirmed with the certificate number NC – 1446 and it is valid to 20 June 2009.

Range of starosty activities which are included in the System are fulfillment of its own tasks described in Working in quality management system means that starosty has its own defined quality politics and in its daily functioning deliberately controls the actions in order to fulfill all tasks effectively, skillfully, reliably, in conformity with the law and professionally. For this reason many organizational solutions were accepted, such as standard ways of dealing with certain groups of affairs, providing necessary resources to do that, taking care of improving workers competence, constant increase of quality significance awareness, improvement inner communication in a company

Politics of quality in the office is accomplished according to following elements:

- performing tasks in skillful reliable and competent way, according to procedures and time which are specified in legal regulations, poviat’s normative acts and internal documents,
- identification of client’s needs and expectations and using collected knowledge to increase the level of service. In order to do this Poviat Office prepared a questionnaire which is supposed to be conducted in the nearest future.
- Ensuring that client get a complex information about range, principles and procedures of accomplishing tasks and dealing with matters by Poviat Office. It is done by placing information boards and by customer service office.
- Taking care of increasing professionalism in all Poviat Office workers. For this reason various kind of trainings are organized.
• introducing the System, which means:
  * analysis and introduction of data and documents to „matrix of responsibility” program.
  * popularizing awareness and knowledge about foundation of the System among all the workers, and also pointing out their own personal range of participation and responsibility as well as practice in attending the program. (a series of trainings)
  * choosing and training an internal audit group SZJ,
  * planning and conducting internal audit, fulfilling correcting and preventing (preventive) actions coming from this audit.
  * performing controls of the System

• initiating, marinating and constant improving of quality management system according to standard’s requirements PN-EN ISO 9001:2001

**Quality management system particularly includes:**

• quality politics accepted to realization and focused on satisfying needs of office clients.

• Quality goals which are measurable and coherent with quality politics, and which realization is periodically judged and verified.

• documentation of the system made and run in electronic version (the program called matrix of responsibility), which includes in particular:
  * the book of quality which describes in details the established system,
  * a set of procedures, regulations, instructions and resolutions which specify in details manners and standards in fulfilling individual actions in procedural terms.
  * a set of procedures which are performed in the Poviat Office with specifying legal requirements of their fulfillment as well as workers who are pointed out by their names and who are responsible for their fulfillment.
• awareness among workers of significance and range of their participation in the activity of the Poviat Office, requirement which are set as well as their personal influence on the quality of provided service and on possibilities of the system development.

• Certain mechanism of improving the System, such as: internal audits, conducting correcting and preventive activities, performing controls of the System Functioning of the Poviat Office in the quality management system brings many advantages, such as:

• Verification of correctness and grounds of the course of individual actions, putting procedures of dealing with affairs in order.

• Identification of client’s needs and expectations

• Increase of workers involvement, increasing awareness about necessity of constant improvement of actions, instrumental role of administration and importance of our clients’ requirements.

• Growth of trust of poviat resident as well as other clients in our office activities, growth of reliability and prestige of the Poviat Office towards institution and external surrounding and European Union structures.

• Launching mechanisms which allow to perfect the system and which lead to constant and stable improvement of given service and client’s satisfaction.

Introducing quality system is not the perfect solution for functioning of public administration. Introducing the system and its skillful functioning is connected with the role of management staff which consequently fulfills quality standards. Active participation of all the office workers in obeying above regulations is also very important. Because quality is not the element which is given forever, but it needs constant care and involvement from all the other elements which are present in office functioning.