QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICES - THE APPROACH OF MANAGERS AND EMPLOYEES

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Abstract

Service quality is one of the most important factors ensuring customer satisfaction; therefore, managing it is one of the priorities in all organizations and can achieve by implementing quality management system (QMS). Various studies have observed that the success of the implementation of QMS depends on the country's public administration traditions and on the management heritage of the organization. The study examines QMS based on ISO 9001 standard that implemented and institution certified more than 15 years ago. During this period several recertification and annual external and internal audits carried out, any nonconformity identified. However, the survey of employees and managers showed that there is a wide range of views on the benefits of QMS for the organization, from the view that it is very important to the view that it does not create any value. The purpose of the study was to determine the reasons for the mentioned difference in attitudes, and the conditions that must be to ensure value creation. The research based on the survey data of the institution's employees and primary and managers.

Key words: quality management, audit reports

JEL Code: M42, M14

Introduction

Any organization providing services, both private and public, cares about the quality of its services, for that purpose, quality management systems (hereinafter - QMS) implemented. Evidence can also found in public sector literature for the hypothesis that an efficient use of management techniques is the key to good public service delivery (Wynen 2016). In this study, we only mean in one way or another formalized QMS, i.e. systems whose scope, processes, responsibilities, etc. legalized by formal documents. Some organizations follow requirements of the ISO 9001 standard when implementing QMS, other organizations have sufficient resources and can afford to develop their own quality management standard, and still others (usually very small companies) simply create intuitive quality assurance processes.

However, any QMS must have at least the following two components − Quality Assurance (hereinafter - QA) and Quality Control (hereinafter - QC). Although QA and QC are the components of the same QMS and some of their activities are interrelated, they defined differently.

ISO 9000 defines QA as that "part of quality management focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled" [ISO 9000:2015, Clause 3.3.6.]. There are more definitions of QA provided by practitioners in the field, such as "all the planned and systematic activities implemented within the quality system that can be demonstrated to provide confidence that a product or service will fulfill requirements for quality" (Rybski et al., 2017). QA provides internal confidence to management and external confidence to customers, government agencies, regulators, certifiers, and other third parties.

Quality control defined as "part of *quality management* focused on fulfilling *quality requirements*" [ISO 9000:2015, Clause 3.3.7.]. While QA relates to how a process performed or how a product made, quality control is more the inspection aspect of quality management. An alternate definition is "the operational techniques and activities used to fulfill requirements for quality" (Rybski et al., 2017).

Properly designed and implemented, QA and QC are key components of a QMS that ensure the quality of services provided, but they do not guarantee stable long-term performance of themselves and the entire QMS. Although most studies indicate that QMS implementation improves service quality, there are studies that have found that formal QMS implementation and certification alone do not ensure quality (Sahoo, 2022; Ali AlShehail, et al., 2022; Lin, Chen, et al., 2023). Social relations in the organization are important for the effective functioning of QMS, the most important of which is the willingness of employees to share knowledge. This requires one more factor - **quality culture.**

QMS will function reliably only if it supported not only by formal QA and QC regulations and procedures, but also by the informal attitude and the daily rules of conduct of the majority of employees and managers. Such behavior can called quality culture. When working on QM processes, institutions expected to develop internal quality cultures, which consider their internal and external realities and related to their organizational culture.

Quality culture defined as "an organizational culture that intends to enhance quality permanently and is characterized by two distinct elements: On the one hand, a cultural/psychological element of shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality. On the other hand, a structural/ managerial element with defined processes

that enhance quality and aim at coordinating individual efforts" (European University Association 2006).

When talking about the quality culture, the question of the boundaries of the organization can also raise - whether the boundaries of the organization are the employees, managers, and owners of the legal entity, or whether the organization should also include interested parties not directly related to it, maybe customers or their representatives.

Also naturally arise questions such as what is the relationship between QA processes and an institutional quality culture, how do they interact, how can an institution ensure that there is synergy between them rather than discord? The basic assumption is that quality culture and quality assurance processes are interrelated, and that quality culture enforced by structural decisions, which stimulate shared values and beliefs (Harvey and Stensaker, 2008).

Furthermore, we accept that quality culture exists as a culture always closely linked to the environment and within one organization; there might even be several sub-cultures of quality (Harvey, 2009). When the institution introduces quality assurance that implies new values, which will have to integrate in the organizational culture. On the other hand, the creation of quality assurance starts from the existing culture, including quality culture (Lanarès, 2008).

At least a few studies have confirmed the claim that the effectiveness of the QM system in ensuring service quality varies from country to country (Prajogo, et al. 2022). Therefore, the question of whether quality management theory is universal is rightly considered as open to debate. Further developing the idea naturally raises the question of the relationship between the culture of the country and the culture of the organization, which importance for QM effectiveness is confirmed by numerous studies (Prajogo, et al. 2022; De Menezes, 2022; Anil, & Satish, 2019). If managers can shape and influence the culture of the organization, then the country's culture could be called "senior", managers have no influence on. On the other hand, it is impossible not to mention the influence of QMS on the organization's ability to create innovative services, people's job satisfaction, and organization sustainability(De Menezes, 2022; Srinivasaiah, 2023; Al Shraah, et al. 2023). Raises the question of how to recognize that a quality culture exists is there general agreement within an institution on the purposes of the QMS and are they generally accepted.

1 Research methodology

The research aimed to assess the role of formal QMS processes and procedures in the institution's activities, as well as to assess the maturity of the quality management culture and the most effective ways to improve quality management. A survey of the institution's employees by distributing an anonymous questionnaire to collect information. There was reason to suspect that some employees were skeptical about the QMS but would not want to reveal it. Therefore, to find out their real opinion, it was necessary to dispel any suspicions that the employee who offended it identified by analyzing the questionnaire data. For this reason, the questions describing the employee in the questionnaire are not detailed, for example, managers not divided into top, middle and primary managers, respondents not asked about their exact functions.

The questionnaire distributed to all employees and managers (more than 2000 persons) of departments that participate in providing services to customers. Two working weeks from Monday to Friday given for responses. Answers provided by 77% of employees and 83% of managers.

2 Research Results

Figures 1 and 2 present a common view of how employees and managers appreciate the usefulness of the QMS for the organization and how important the defined operational processes are to the daily work of employees.

The distribution of answers to the question of how much the currently operating QMS is useful for the institution presented in Figure 1. The attitudes of managers and employees are quite similar. If the weighted average evaluation grade given by managers is equal to five, then that of employees is 4.37.

Fig. 1: the percentage of employees and managers who gave a certain grade to the usefulness of QMS to the organization.
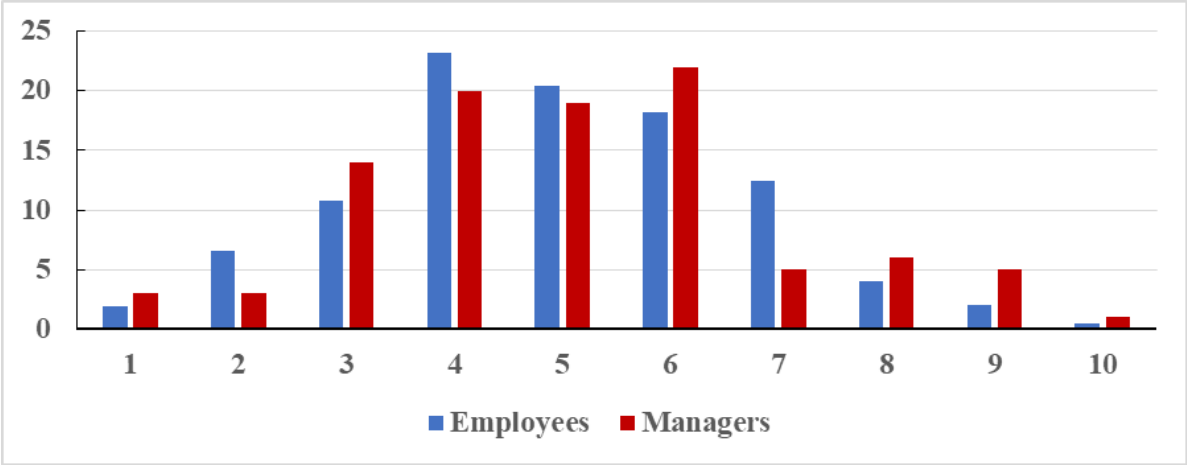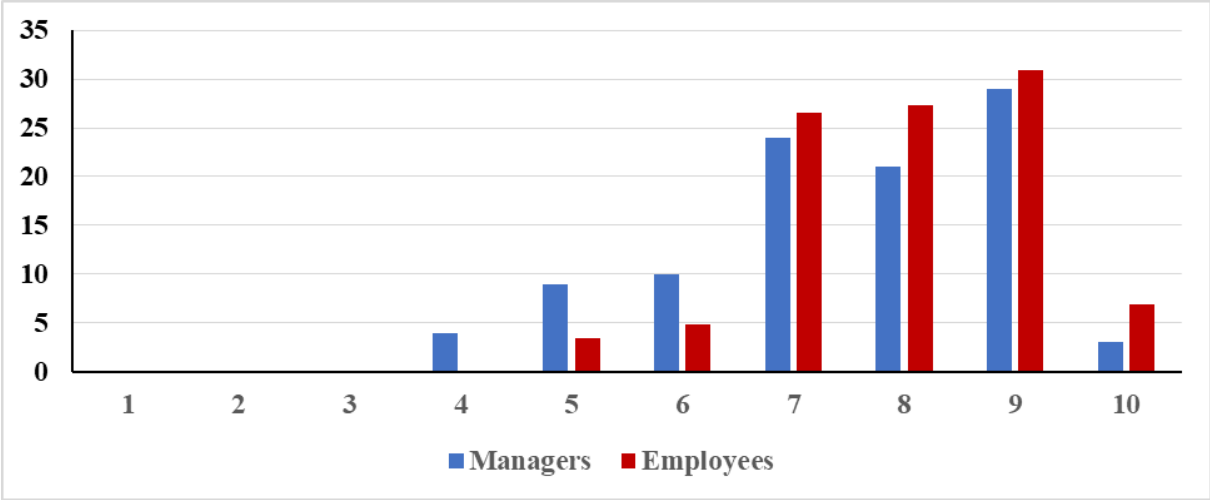

Source: authors

However, even expressing the opinion that the QMS is not very beneficial to the organization, most managers and especially employees tend to follow the established work processes. The distribution of answers to the question of how precisely they follow defined work processes presented in Figure 2. If the weighted average evaluation grade given by managers is equal to 7.49 that of employees is 7.24.

By comparing how the attitude towards the usefulness of QMS associated with compliance with established work procedures, it was found that both employees and managers who better appreciate the benefits of QMS for the organization are more inclined to follow established work procedures at the same time. 93% of respondents who rated the usefulness of the QMS for the organization higher than the weighted average also said that they follow the established work procedures more than the weighted average.

Fig. 2: Proportion (percentage) of managers and employees according to the extent to which they follow established work procedures.

Source: authors

Another question sought to reveal how the QMS process followed in the organization. The QMS process determines that a direct manager must communicate changes in work procedures to employees. The results shown in Figure 3.

Fig. 3: Sources from which employees (outer ring) and managers (inner ring) learn about changes in work procedures.
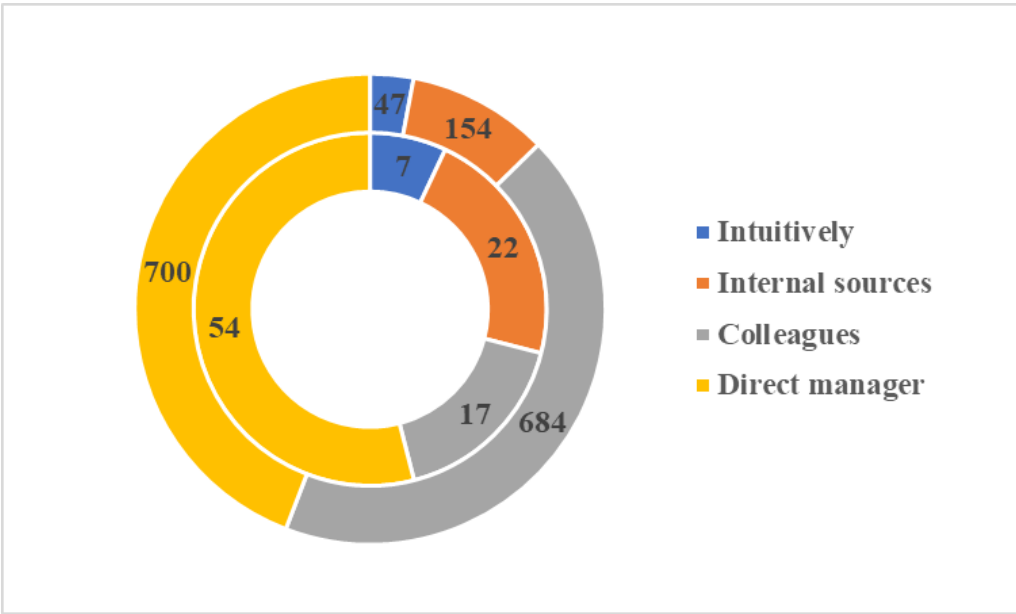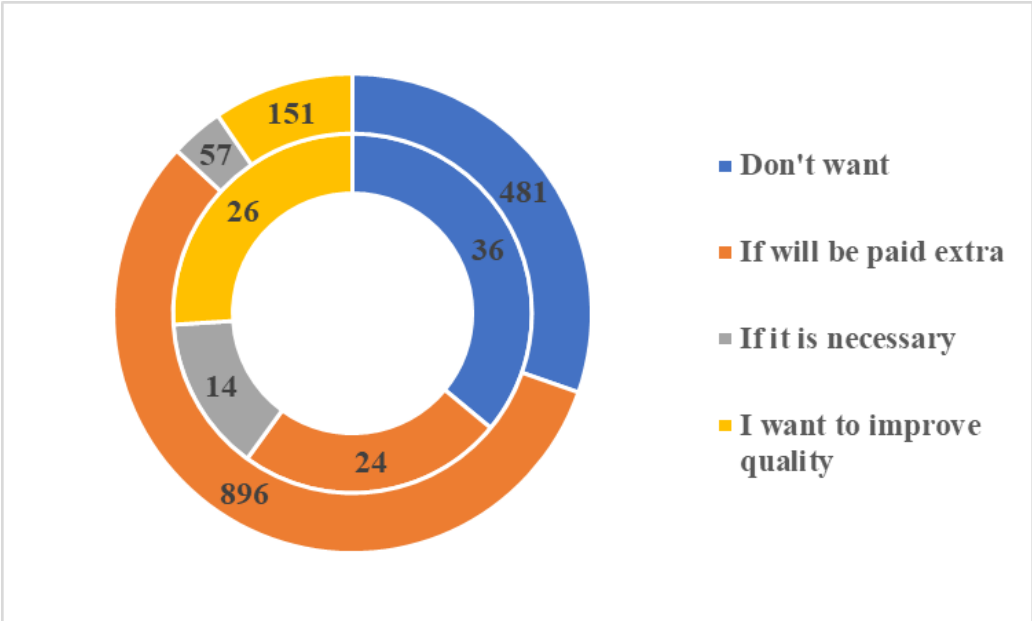

Source: authors

The dominant channel is the one set in the QMS process. Among employees, learning from colleagues is at the same level, but such responses may be a consequence of the organization of work in departments and should not be considered a non-conformity of the

QMS process. The QMS procedures stipulate that the direct manager ensures information and may assign the actual presentation and interpretation to one or more specialists. Therefore, the respondents chose this particular answer. The next question should reveal the involvement of employees and managers in QMS, the results of the answers shown in Figure 4.

Fig. 4: Conditions when employees (outer ring) and managers (inner ring) agree to participate in QMS support and development.
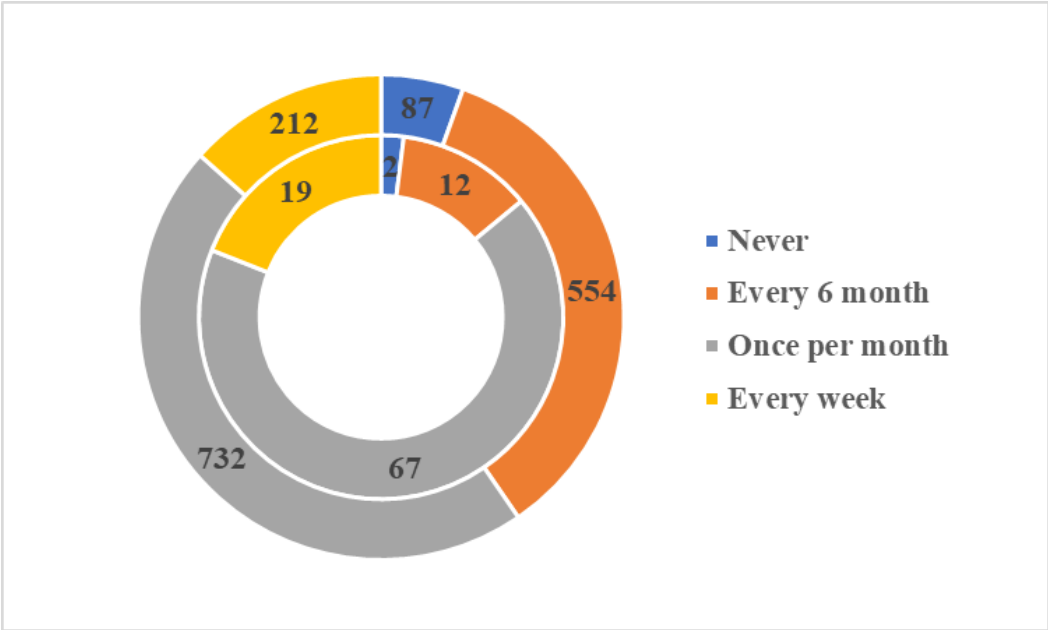

Source: authors

As we can see, the willingness of employees to get involved in QMS support and development is extremely low, most of them would either not want to participate in it at all or would participate only for additional pay. Perhaps such a reluctance to get involved could explained by a sufficiently heavy daily workload. It is also worth noting that not all employees who are completely unwilling to participate in QMS development rated the benefits of QMS poorly when answering the first question. As not all employees who want to participate in the development of QMS rated its usefulness to the organization well. Therefore, a more detailed clarification of the reasons for such an approach could be the subject of further research. The next two questions intended to reveal the extent to which service quality and QMS topics are relevant to employees and managers. Every day employees communicate with each other not only formally. It is natural that the most important topics that concern everyone are also touched upon during those informal conversations. By formulating the question in this way, we knew that when discussing the

quality of services, the word "quality" itself does not necessarily have to use, we could talk about customer satisfaction, service delivery time, accuracy, and other indicators

From the answers, it can concluded that the topic of service quality is quite common among both employees and especially managers. The last of the questions discussed in this article concerns the place of QMS itself on the agenda of employees and managers. As we can see from the answers, both for managers and especially for employees, QMS processes are not a topic that they think about every day.

Fig. 5: Frequency of discussions about service quality among employees (outer ring) and managers (inner ring).

Source: authors

3   Discussion

The QMS implemented almost 15 years ago and more than half of all employees of the institution did not work in the institution before the implementation of the QMS. Therefore, there is no reason to think that the reason for the sufficiently low evaluation of the usefulness of QMS for the organization is resistance to changes. Thus, some employees do not follow work procedures and do not appreciate the benefits provided by QMS to the organization, but still perform daily tasks. On the other hand, it is tempting not follow the procedures because the ranking of the QMS is not high enough. In this way, a closed circle formed. An assumption that established work procedures are incorrect or they interfere with work rejected

because majority employees follow established follow them and successfully carry out their daily tasks. Therefore, it assumed that the reasons should sought in the established culture of the organization, in which the role of QMS is not yet significant enough.

Analysing the performance of QMS processes itself (question 3) it also observed that both employees and managers focused on the achievement of the result and not on the process. If information about changes obtained in a different way than established in the QMS process, some employees behave in that way. At first glance, this behaviour may seem acceptable, but it remembered that only the process established by the QMS has a quality control mechanism and resources ensuring that information delivered and understood correctly. Thus, in this case too, it can be said that the behaviour of the employees conditioned by insufficient knowledge and the related inaccurate assessment of the situation.

The motivation of employees to participate in QMS development can also linked to organizational culture. It is understandable that employees who do not believe in the benefits of QMS to the organization are unlikely to want to join it's maintenance. However, the fact that it is necessary to pay attention is that the question proposes to participate in the improvement of the QMS. This means that a large number of employees and managers not only think that the existing QMS is imperfect, but generally do not see the prospects of its usefulness.

The culture of the organization influences how employees behave executing work tasks, and the topics and content of informal communication. The results of the answers to the fifth question allow us to say that quality issues are important both for the employees of the organization and even more so for the managers. However, the same cannot said for the QMS itself and its processes, as shown by the answers to the sixth question. Comparing the answers to these two questions, it can asserted that the quality itself is important for the employees of the organization, but the QMS has not reached a sufficient level of trust.

Conclusion

Formal implementation of QMS and even certification of the organization ensures a certain quality of the provided services but does not ensure the sustainability of the QMS itself in the end. Even the long-term operation of QMS does not form a quality management culture in the organization, additional attention and resources are required for this.

To form an adequate QM culture, the contribution of all interested parties needed; it is likely that it is appropriate to include the organization's customers in the development of the QMS.

Special attention should paid to the improvement of the QMS itself.

All stakeholders, and especially employees and managers, must agree on how the QMS process be measured, evaluated and improved.

Internal communication, discussions and devolved responsibility while understanding the resistance to change and developing strategies to overcome it are the most important instruments to create a high-level quality culture.

Periodical self-evaluation as a collective exercise recommended for each structural unit of the organization.

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