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# Quality improvement in Polish public administration in the context of the creativity potential of tools and techniques of customer satisfaction research

Doskonalenie jakości w polskiej administracji publicznej w kontekście potencjału tkwiącego w narzędziach kreatywności i technikach badania zadowolenia klienta

## Abstract

The article presents the results of research showing changes in the use of creativity tools and customer satisfaction measurement techniques in Polish public administration focused on pro-quality activities. The study covers three periods: 2010, 2015 and 2020. The aim of the analysis is to identify trends in the perception of creativity tools, as well as to show changes in the use of techniques allowing for the assessment of the level of customer satisfaction.

## Keywords

creativity tools, customer satisfaction measurement, administration, quality improvement

## Streszczenie

W artykule zaprezentowano wyniki badań wskazujących na zmiany zakresu stosowania narzędzi kreatywności i technik pomiaru zadowolenia klienta w polskiej administracji publicznej, ukierunkowanej na działania pro-jakościowe. Badania dotyczą trzech okresów: 2010, 2015 i 2020 roku. Celem analizy jest wyłonienie tendencji w percepcji narzędzi kreatywności i ukazanie zmian w zakresie stosowania technik pozwalających na ocenę poziomu zadowolenia klienta.

## Słowa kluczowe

narzędzia kreatywności, pomiar zadowolenia klienta, administracja, doskonalenie jakości

JEL: O30, M0, C83, L32

## Introduction

Modern times are characterized by a high degree of complexity and ambiguity. At the changing environment prompts many organizations to develop the skills of quick adaptation and high flexibility of operations. As stated by Henry J. Lindborg: "We live in the era of disruption in which the lack of agility is the kiss of death" (Lindborg, 2020, p. 5). Non-commercial institutions are also transforming. It seems

necessary to evolve through continuous innovation, including pro-quality innovation. This aspect emphasized numerous authors (Ibidapo, 2022; Wolniak, 2018; Krot, 2019; Bukowska-Piastrzyńska, 2019; Detyna, 2014; Blicharz & Zacharko, 2018). Directing public institutions to the recipient of the service may be considered a symptom of maturation of the Polish administration (Chojnacka, 2011a, p. 81). Improving quality in public administration offices requires breaking up with previously adopted

patterns of behaviour and increasing activity in the area of creativity. Recognizing this course of action requires the maximization of the efforts of all employees and their intrinsic motivation. It is advisable that customers actively participate in the improvement process. There is no doubt that creativity tools and customer satisfaction measurement methods are helpful in taking pro-quality activities. For example, creativity instruments allow employees to share opinions, which enriches managers' knowledge of the situations experienced and difficulties in the workplace (Chojnacka, 2010). Problems found are a catalyst for corrective action. The weaknesses and threats that the clients of the office notice are equally important (Chojnacka, 2011, pp. 224–239). People who are dissatisfied with the service may file a complaints, grievances and requests form, and critical comments should be treated as a gift, as they enable the organization to take initiatives to improve its operations. Such an approach is only possible in a culture of openness and acceptance of customer suggestions. It is therefore worth taking a look at the tools that facilitate the acquisition of such information.

The main initiation is a service of providing quality improvement services in public administration in the tool slumbering tools in creativity tools and customer satisfaction survey techniques in 2010, 2015, 2015, as well as further identifying trends in the perception of 2020 creation tools, as well as showing changes in the tool technique 2020 to assess the level of customer satisfaction. Respondents must be among the winners and distinguished in the Polish Quality Award (PNJ) competition. In the search engines of the eliminated finalists of the competition from 1995 to 2020 in total. City halls, local governments split, respectively, and the government. The sample size obtained in 2010 was 50%, in 2015, in 2020 — 30%.

The specific objectives are: a literature query, identification of the methods of creativity and satisfaction measurement methods used by administration institutions, as well as recommendations for representatives of the level managing public administration.

In order to achieve this goal, it was necessary to formulate research questions, which were based on the Polish and foreign research achievements to date. An attempt was made to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Do public organizations use quality management models and systems and does the scope of their application change over the years 2010, 2015, 2020?
2. Do public organizations use methods of performance analysis and does the scope of their application change over the years?

3. What is the scope of application of creativity instruments by public administration entities and does the scope of their application change over the years 2010, 2015, 2020?
4. What instruments are used for customer satisfaction surveys and does the scope of its application change over the years 2010, 2015, 2020?

The author's considerations allowed for the formulation of the following research hypothesis:

Creativity tools and techniques for measuring customer satisfaction in Polish public administration focused on pro-quality activities are used, and the scope of their use changes over the years 2010, 2015, 2020.

The presented article is an attempt to synthetically summarize the ten-year research carried out by the author herself.

## Adjustment of administration offices to the challenges of the present day

The transformations are, in a way, assigned to administrative units. Practitioners and theorists indicate the need to reduce bureaucracy in public institutions and the need to implement changes within the internal organization, including modification of the leadership style, reconstruction, official ethos, and implementation of performance management. Public administration offices struggle with their weaknesses. Noteworthy are problems resulting from discrepancies in the interpretation of the applicable law. Moreover, the administration is struggling with high staff turnover, which makes it difficult to develop and implement long-term strategies and a coherent development policy. In addition, there are difficulties resulting from the culture of operation of this type of organization. Mention is also made mention of protectionism, use of imperative instruments in relation to the client, formal and procedural treatment of duties, lack of cooperation between employees, poor communication and a *culture of secrecy* manifested by being closed to dialogue with stakeholders.

Offices are looking for ways to increase the effectiveness of the improvement actions taken. Not forgetting that these actions must comply with legal, political, social and ethical aspects, administration offices are looking for ways to increase the effectiveness of improvement activities. It is recommended that public institutions use modern information technology solutions in their statutory activities on a larger scale. Web technologies are indicated as a tool for creating innovation in process management

(Hauke, 2018, pp. 184–198). In addition, organizational changes modify the attitudes of officials. They are being made aware that their main role is to serve the citizens (Skwarek, 2021, p. 77), which they should treat as a mission. It should be remembered that "the quality of administration is determined, inter alia, by intellectual, moral, and professional level of officials and their commitment" (Szreniawski, 2011, p. 98). It is argued that the quality of the administration's activities and the activities of officials depends on the courtesy of officials, their habits, understanding of their role and their responsibility. In this sense, a perfect organization is one that understands its mission. Currently, the assessment of an official takes into account criteria related to: courtesy, kindness, honesty, reliability, relations with subordinates, colleagues and other stakeholders (Szreniawski, 2002, pp. 480–481). Officials are expected to be: impartial, impeccable, honest, competent and empathetic. In addition, the employees of the entity are required to identify with the goals and values relevant to the administration. The staff should also be open to the aspect of diversity in society. Furthermore, officials are expected to demonstrate consistency between their private and professional lives (Stadniczeńko, 2009, p. 658).

The above-mentioned requirements for an office worker are not the only ones. They are complemented by the necessity to engage in various activities related to quality in administration, which in turn is associated with creativity and the ability to overcome resistance to introducing new solutions. According to Marek Brzeziński, in contemporary organizations, there is rarely a climate conducive to undertaking changes. Therefore, it is necessary to "... create a new organizational form in which creativity will become one of the paradigms" (Brzeziński, 2009, p. 10). The necessary condition for creating a pro-quality culture is the elimination of barriers such as: lack of resources and support for trying out new solutions, bureaucracy, short-sightedness, resistance to changes, fear of taking risks, tendency to conformism, control by management, meticulous analysis of concepts, rigid hierarchy within the organization, communication difficulties, competitive tendency, stress, anxiety and insecurity (Proctor, 1998, pp. 34–38; Wojciechowska, 2014, pp. 212–213). Public administration institutions are still assigned a mechanistic and bureaucratic management system, hierarchical system of subordination, strictly defined competences to perform tasks (Kozuch, 2011, p. 76), difficulties with interpersonal communication (Bugdol, 2008, p. 46), employee independence limited by

procedures, reduced motivation (Wright, 2004, p. 59), highly developed control apparatus, impersonal communication system, unreflective enforcement of procedures (Kapuścik, 2015, p. 138). All of the above features seem to be negatively correlated with creativity.

A modern organization is expected to be flexible, diversify the forms of customer service, care for customer satisfaction (Hawrysz, 2014, p. 25), shape the quality of life as a result of cooperation with stakeholders, and strengthen trust. The expectations would be met by creating a friendly organizational atmosphere that encourages the promotion of a policy of openness based on timeless values such as truth, honesty, empathy and respect. Favourable conditions for development are fostered by creating conditions for teamwork, delegating tasks and greater employee participation (Penc, 2010, p. 76) or promoting the assumptions of reforms and instruments of New Public Management (Ignacy, 2017). P. Romaniuk draws attention to the concept of efficiency of public management based on the idea *agathos*, and this approach is complementary to the existing management humanistic reasoning (Romaniuk, 2019, p. 241).

## Research aim and methods

In 2010, 2015 and 2020, research was carried out to identify methods of measuring creativity and satisfaction used by administrative institutions. The respondents came from the group of winners and those distinguished in the Polish Quality Award (PNJ) competition. In general, all the finalists from 1995 to 2020 were surveyed. Public administration offices shared information on the instruments used. The sample size obtained in 2010 was 50 per cent in 2015 40 per cent, and in 2020 30 per cent. The results and conclusions apply to the entire designated community. The study was quantitative and was carried out on the basis of a questionnaire, consisting of three parts. In the first part, the respondents answered questions about the degree of use of creativity tools. In the second, they answered questions relating to the areas in which creativity tools are used. The third part concerned customer satisfaction measurement tools. A record was attached to the questionnaire, in which the respondents provided data on the number of employees and information about the implemented formalized quality management systems or about taking other actions to implement pro-quality projects.

The questionnaires were sent to public administration offices by regular mail in 2010, and five and ten years later by e-mail.

It seems that the three-period survey covered organizations that can be considered quality-driven entities. All of them have taken action to improve quality. Expressing readiness to participate in the PNJ competition and willingness to compete with other participants for the "Best of the Best" award or self-assessment is an expression of concern for the shape of the services provided. This gives the organizations an opportunity to identify their strengths and areas that require support or corrective actions. It should be noted that these offices are aware of the role of continuous improvement and the importance of striving for excellence in each area of activity. This direction should be well-known to all modern institutions, regardless of their nature.

The organizations that responded to the survey belong to large institutions (in terms of the number of people employed). In the survey conducted in 2010, the most numerous group were respondents employing 301–700 employees (60 per cent); the remainder employed over 700 employees. Similarly, it was in the 2015 study: the most numerous entity was represented by organizations employing over 700 people (50 per cent), then entities employing from 301 to 700 people (40 per cent). Organizations employing 30–100 people accounted for only 10 per cent. In the survey conducted in 2020, the most numerous group were respondents employing from 301–700 employees (60 per cent), the rest employed over 700 employees. This information is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Characteristics of the surveyed organizations according to the size of employment**

No	Employment size	Percentage by year		
		2010	2015	2020
1	100–300	0	10	0
2	301–700	60	40	60
3	Over 700 employees	40	50	40

Source: own study.

Over the years, the attitude of the organization to the use of quality systems and quality models has changed, as shown in Table 2. Thanks to systems and models, administration offices gain access to knowledge and solutions contained in them. This allows for organising the organizational structure, delegating powers, updating

the scopes of official rights and duties, improving and documenting processes, as well as implementing efficient information channels (employee — employee and employee — customer). For example, the introduction of the 9000 series standards contributes to the improvement of various areas of the office operation. Among other things, it is achieved:

- greater effectiveness of activities, because redundant or duplicated activities are eliminated, non-compliance is prevented, employees work more efficiently thanks to the knowledge of their rights and responsibilities, due to clearly defined standards and principles, the adaptation of new employees is more efficient,
- greater effectiveness of activities, thanks to the improvement of the use of human and technical resources, improvement of internal cooperation and communication between employees, and improvement of the quality of service, which translates into customer satisfaction,
- improvement of the image, as the certification of independent auditors of the certification body gives credibility to the authority.

According to the position of Krzysztof Krukowski, there is a growing interest in concepts using a process approach, including: quality management, knowledge management, reengineering e-government, Digital Era Governance, Lean Government (Krukowski, 2011, p. 27). These concepts, however, seem to be closer to foreign institutions than to Polish ones. An interesting system for monitoring the quality of local public services seems to be the Local Government Analysis System (SAS). It is a pioneering Polish undertaking in which the Association of Polish Cities is involved (Cyfert & Szumowski, 2015, p. 55).

It is worth adding that public institutions can use ready-made models free of charge. This is the case, among others, for CAF (Common Assessment Framework), which does not require a license. The CAF consists of a set of nine criteria (five of which relate to potential, four relate to results). An organization based on the CAF can make a self-assessment. Costs may arise when the Office deems it appropriate to use the support of a consultant.

Table 2 shows that in 2015 the Offices approached the implementation of quality systems and models with greater impetus. This action was dictated by the need to increase social trust in the functioning of public entities in terms of transparency, reliability and impartiality of decisions made by them. It seemed that this trend would continue in the coming years. However, this did not happen. Apart from systems and models, the Offices also use methods of analyzing and evaluating the effectiveness of activities. In the 2010 study, there was no question regarding the

**Table 2. Models and quality systems used by administrative units**

No	Applied systems, quality models	Percentage by year		
		2010	2015	2020
1	Own, Quality Assurance System	10	0	10
2	ISO series 9000	60	60	50
3	ISO 14001	50	20	0
4	PN-N 18001/ISO 18001	-	30	0
5	ISO 27001	-	50	80
6	ISO 26000	-	10	0
7	Total Quality Management (TQM)	-	30	0
8	Kaizen	-	10	0
9	Benchmarking	-	60	0
10	Polish Quality Award PNJ	-	30	0
11	CAF	-	30	0
12	EMAS	-	10	0
13	System of counteracting corruption threats	-	20	0

Source: own study.

specification of the scope of application of this group of instruments. Therefore, Table 3 presents only data for 2015 and 2020.

Table 3 shows that the administration offices use various methods of analysing the effectiveness of their activities. They are prompted to do so not only by the obligation, but also by the need to improve the structure, constructure and organizational effectiveness.

## Results of the research

The representatives of the top staff were asked about the current scope of application of individual creativity tools. They made this assessment on a scale from 0 to 5, where: (0 — meant that a given creation instrument is not used at all; 1 — it is used very rarely; 2 — it is used rarely; 3 — it is used quite often; 4 — it is widely used; 5 — is the most frequently used instrument). The arithmetic means calculated for the assessments made by the respondents participating in the study show the scope of application of the creation instruments (Table 4).

**Table 3. Methods used to analyse the effectiveness of activities**

No.	The methods used for the analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of activities	Percentage by year		
		2010	2015	2020
1	Audit	No data	100	100
2	Review of managing personnel	No data	100	90
3	Management control system	No data	100	100
4	Self-assessment according to Polish Quality Award	No data	30	0
5	Customer satisfaction level	No data	70	80

Source: own study.

**Table 4. The scope of using creativity instruments by the public administrations surveyed**

No.	Creativity techniques used	Average of grades in years			Total Average
		2010	2015	2020	
1	Classic brainstorming	2,6	2,4	3,8	2,9
2	Effects and aftermath	3,0	2,1	3,2	2,8
3	Consider All Factors	3,2	1,6	1,6	2,1
4	Varieties of brainstorming	2,8	2,1	0,8	1,9
5	Advantages, Disadvantages, What's Interesting	2,2	1,7	1,6	1,8
6	Alternatives. Possibilities. Choice	2,8	1,1	1,2	1,7
7	The Box	1,6	1,0	1,2	1,3
8	Pros and cons	1,2	0,4	1,0	1,3

Source: own study based on the survey results.

**Table 5. Instruments used for customer satisfaction surveys in public administration offices**

No.	Measurement methods	Value of the arithmetic mean in years			Total
		2010	2015	2020	
1	Analysis of complaints, grievances, requests	4,6	4,2	5,0	4,6
2	Survey paper questionnaires	4,4	3,6	5,0	4,3
3	Benchmarking	4,2	3,0	3,0	3,4
4	Internet survey	3,6	3,0	2,5	3,0
5	Personal interviews	0,8	1,0	2,5	1,4

Source: own study based on the survey results.

It was assumed that the table will only present those tools that achieve the arithmetic mean greater than or equal to 1 in the analysed period. The data in Table 4 show that the administration which improves quality uses many creativity techniques. However, for any of the indicated instruments, there was no arithmetic mean of five or close to five. This means that the respondents (as a whole group) did not select any tool that could be classified as the most frequently used for this group. There was no arithmetic mean close to four that would indicate a frequent use of the instrument. However, an average close to three appeared in the studied sample. It proves that the tool is used quite often; this regards the classic brainstorming technique as well as the effects and aftermath technique. Rarely used tools include: Consider All Factors, Brainstorming Variations and Advantages, Disadvantages, What's Interesting, and very rarely use the Box method and Pros and Cons. There is also a group of techniques (not included in the table) that are extremely rarely used by a few entities. These include: Seven Mind Hats, Disruption, Walt Disney's method, Forced Fit Incentives, Table of Elements, Rejection, Stepping Stone, Classic pros and cons, mind map.

It seems that the tools most frequently used by the sample entities are generally the most popular. The other instruments of lateral thinking received significantly lower scores. Students of administrative faculties would have not had the opportunity to encounter these tools in the education process for years, which may result in their later non-application in practice.

The respondents were asked about the scope of application of customer satisfaction measurement methods. This assessment was made on a scale from 0 to 5, i.e., analogously to the previous case, where 0 meant that the given instrument is not used at all, and 5 — that it is most often used. The

averages show the scope of application of the measurement methods in the entire research sample (Table 5).

The basis for further arguments is the assumption that the table presents only such measurement methods that have obtained the arithmetic mean greater than or equal to 1 in the analysed year 2010, 2015 or 2020. The data in Table 5 show that the surveyed public institutions use many methods to measure the quality of services. In the analysed period, the analysis of complaints and grievances and requests was in the first place in the ranking of the tools used. It should be noted that this analysis was 4.6 (rounded 5), which means that it was the most frequently used tool. Compared to other instruments, this measurement leads the way.

According to the data presented in Table 5, the administration does not use instruments used by commercial entities. There is little interest in such methods as the CSI customer satisfaction index, Servqual or mastery shopping.

## Conclusion

The study is an attempt to identify the problem of quality improvement in public administration. It was assumed that improving the operation of this type of institution requires acquiring new skills. The organizations can:

- use proven patterns of conduct, models,
- look for opportunities for improvement through creative activities,
- analyse the activities carried out so far, listening to the voice of customers, and taking corrective actions based on the weaknesses indicated by them.

The public administration units surveyed show openness to the implementation of models and

systems to improve management. They also use methods of analysis and effectiveness of activities (such as: management control system, audit, measurement of customer satisfaction). Improving public organizations should be less associated with creative activities. This may result from barriers inherent in such organizations, such as bureaucracy, hierarchical system of subordination, resistance to change, conformism, and an extensive control apparatus. Adapting to customer expectations requires getting to know their needs and determining their satisfaction and fulfilment. The organizations very often analyse complaints, grievances and requests, and often conduct a questionnaire survey. Customer satisfaction surveys are the basis on which administrative institutions can develop. It is also part of the process of continuous improvement of service standards. Over the years, the scope of application of customer satisfaction measurement instruments in offices has changed. Still, the most frequently used instrument is inference based on customer suggestions and complaints. It is up to the persons responsible for shaping the curricula to apply for introducing into the net of subjects the issues related to the improvement of quality in a public administration unit. People responsible for shaping curricula should be asked to introduce into the

subject network issues related to the improvement of quality in a public administration unit.

To sum up, the research carried out over a period of 15 years (with a five-year cyclicity) shows that creativity tools and customer satisfaction measurement methods are used, and their use changes over the analysed period.

Summing up, the research conducted over a period of 15 years (with a five-year cyclicity) shows that models and management systems are used by offices, and their use changes over the analyzed period. The situation is similar with the use of creativity techniques and satisfaction survey tools. Bearing in mind the speed, unpredictability and ambiguity of changes generated by the environment, it is recommended that public administration managers adopt a new perspective on organizations. It is important to "to build and activate the connections necessary for people to more actively discover new ideas, develop those ideas into minimum viable products and solutions, and diffuse those ideas across an organization for scalable impact. For example, discovery connections represent the bridge relationships across groups. They help organizations overcome insularity, which stifles adaptation. Bridge connections provide access to more ideas, insights and information" (Lindborg, 2020).

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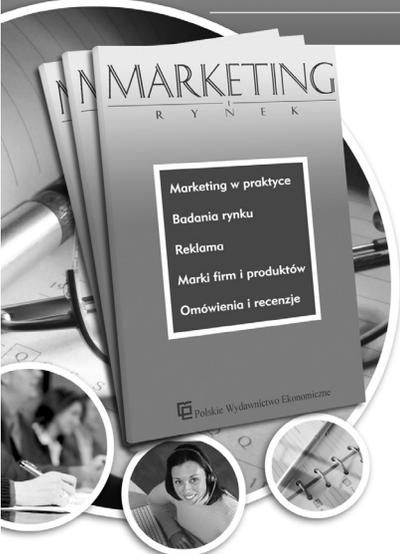
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