

## Quality Management Standard for Learning Service Providers – Critical Analysis

Submitted: 30.09.16 | Accepted: 29.11.16

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The paper discusses the usefulness of two dedicated quality management systems for learning service providers. The systems have been described in the international standard ISO 29990 and Polish national standards MSUES (Małopolska Standards for Education and Training Services). The results are based on a survey of managers who have implemented one of those systems in their training companies. It was found that the implementation of the discussed systems could contribute to success on the training market. The quality of training services is viewed as an important factor in personnel improvement. Most of the studies on that subject omit the key cause of high quality training, which is quality management in the training company. This paper attempts to bridge that gap.

**Keywords:** training company, quality management, management standards, research results.

## Standard zarządzania jakością dla dostawców usług szkoleniowych – krytyczna analiza

Nadesłany: 30.09.16 | Zaakceptowany do druku: 29.11.16

W artykule omówiono przydatność dwu dedykowanych systemów zarządzania jakością dla dostawców usług szkoleniowych. Systemy zostały opisane w międzynarodowym standardzie ISO 29990 oraz polskim standardzie MSUES. Prezentowane wyniki opierają się na przeprowadzonych badaniach menedżerów, którzy wdrożyli jeden z omawianych systemów w swoim przedsiębiorstwie. Wyniki pokazują, że wdrożenie omawianych systemów może przyczynić się do osiągnięcia sukcesu na rynku szkoleniowym. Jakość usług szkoleniowych jest uważana za istotny czynnik wpływający na efektywność podnoszenia kompetencji pracowników. Tymczasem większość badań w tym temacie omija kluczowy czynnik wpływający na wysoką jakość szkolenia, którym jest zarządzanie jakością w firmie dostarczającej usługi edukacyjne. Artykuł wpisuje się w tę lukę.

**Słowa kluczowe:** firma szkoleniowa, zarządzanie jakością, standardy zarządzania, wyniki badań.

**JEL:** M1, M53

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## 1. Introduction

Many researchers indicate the importance of training for improving quality management in an enterprise and even analyse the impact of training on changing the attitudes of employees. This approach has been applied by, for example: Galloway and Ho (1996) – a study of factors affecting the quality of training and Clegg, Rees and Titchen (2010) – a study into the effectiveness of training in the field of quality management. Much less attention is paid to training companies (learning service providers, LSPs), which are one of the main agents affecting the effects of training in enterprises. There are a large number of publications devoted to methods of training design, which are aimed at obtaining high training quality, for example: Branch (2009), Reigeluth (2012), Smith and Ragan (2005), Byrnes and Baxter (2012), Wood and Dickinson (2011), Werner and Weckenmann (2009). It should be noted, however, that training design and training quality are just some of the issues related to the management of a training company (which should also take into account, for example, the formulation of the vision and objectives, and monitoring activities). Therefore, it would be wrong to place an equal sign between the quality of training and the quality of management in a training company. This paper focuses on the issue of the quality of management, not the training design.

A significant amount of research on the functioning of educational institutions concerns formal education<sup>1</sup>, and particularly higher education. The results presented by Sakhivel and Paradise (2006) – examining the effectiveness of the educational model; Arif and Ilyas (2011) – factors influencing the satisfaction of students; Quinn, Lemay, Larsen, and Johnson – the use of QFD to improve the quality of services in higher education; Ree, Park and Yoo (2014) – using the design of experiments to improve the quality of lectures; are particularly noteworthy. The authors propose to improve important areas of the functioning of the university. The results of the studies on higher education can only be used to a limited extent by the learning service providers, because of the different ways of operation. The functioning of training companies differs from that of universities in, among others:

- entrepreneurial approach,
- focus on the short form of education,
- high flexibility in preparing and delivering training,
- modification of the programs for a particular customer,
- small number of employed staff,
- different legal requirements.

The operation of a training company, including its quality management system, is essential for the effectiveness of training in enterprises (customers of the LSPs). Great importance is attached to this issue by the European Union, which published a series of recommendations and resolutions in

this regard, among others: *Council Resolution (2007)*, *Conclusions of the Council (2009 and 2010)*, *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (2008 and 2009)*.

The quality management system in a company is described by the ISO 9001 standard. Despite the availability and popularity of this standard, only a few training companies have implemented and certified it. In the opinion of the managers of companies surveyed in our research, the standard unduly limits the flexibility of the operation and restricts entrepreneurial behaviours. In addition, the maintenance of the system in small and micro-enterprises is an expensive and laborious process. It does not relate to increased revenues. In interviews, the managers of training companies pointed out that the training industry needs its own standard, which could be adjusted to the specifics of LSPs and their business models.

Taking such voices into consideration, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has begun work on the development of management standards for a training company. The ISO 29990:2010 'Learning services for non-formal education and training – Basic requirements for service providers' is a source of a unified standard for learning service providers, including corporations, vocational institutions, and life-long learning centres, around the globe. The standard has been developed by the technical committee ISO/TC 232 *Learning services for non-formal education and training* of the ISO (ISO, 2015). The aim of the committee is to deliver a standardization of requirements for learning services provided outside formal education, including vocational and professional education and training. Besides the ISO 29990 standard, the committee has also released the ISO 29991:2014 'Language learning outside formal education services – Requirements'. Currently, the efforts of the committee are engaged in preparing the ISO 19366 standard 'Learning services outside formal education – Requirements' or a generic service standard – 'Learning services outside formal education'. Seventeen national representatives are taking part in the committee's project ISO/TC 232, and a further 16 representatives have been given the status of observers (ISO, 2015).

The ISO 29990 standard was published in 2010, but it has not gained popularity. It has been poorly recognized in both training companies and other enterprises. The evaluation of the effects of the use of standard requirements could provide training companies with the information they need to make decisions about the implementation of a dedicated quality management system. The chance of such an assessment appeared in connection with the project carried out by the Regional Labour Office in Cracow, Poland. The Office developed its own standard for quality management in a training company, which was based on ISO 29990. The requirements of this standard were presented in a higher level of detail; however, they comply with the requirements of ISO 29990. Significant differences concern

the lack of management reviews, preventive actions and internal audits, as proposed by the international standard<sup>2</sup>.

The aim of this study was to evaluate the usefulness of dedicated standards for learning service providers. The study focuses primarily on two issues: managers' perception of the impact of the application of standard requirements on the success of the organization and the assessment of the implementation difficulty level. The following hypotheses have been assumed:

- (1) Managers of training companies perceive dedicated quality management systems as contributing to the success of their businesses.
- (2) The implementation of a dedicated QMS does not create significant difficulties for company training.
- (3) Managers of training companies perceive quality management techniques as contributing to the success of their businesses.
- (4) The usefulness of a dedicated quality management system is independent of the size of the training company.

The main research method was a questionnaire that was completed by managers of leading Polish training companies. Additional information was collected through participant observation and an analysis of reports from audits that were carried out in the surveyed companies.

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1. Population**

The Polish training market is estimated to be worth around €1 billion with up to 6000 firms operating in the area. The market is determined by two crucial factors. The first is the flow of EU funds to Poland. The European Union has allotted €11 billion for training activities in Poland in the past few years, which resulted in a sudden increase in the number of training firms in the years 2007–2008. However, the negative outcome of the facilitated access to the donations was a noticeable decrease in the quality of training (Danilewicz, 2013). Moreover, for many firms, the period between finishing one project and starting another was a time of financial problems. Those problems were overlapped by the effects of the second factor, the economic crisis, which made many firms cut the budget for training. More than 70% of Polish firms are estimated to have followed the pattern in 2010. The decline in the demand for training services complicated the situation of the training firms. Companies that operate on the Polish training market are mostly very small with limited factual potential. The firms find it difficult to provide a satisfactory level of their services as the market still prefers to reduce expenses at the cost of quality (Wawer, 2012). Facing more and more serious financial problems and market competition, the training firms try to find opportunities to reinforce

their position. The research has shown that the most popular actions in the area were (HRP, 2014):

- looking for new clients (42.8%),
- including new training topics to their offer (42.3%),
- looking for new partners for cooperation (36.3%),
- introducing modern teaching techniques in their trainings, for example e-learning (27.9%),
- changing the line of business (14.6%),
- lowering the prices of training services (8.5%).

It is worth noticing that less than 5% of the respondents support the continuous increase of service quality and aim at receiving a proper certificate. Meanwhile, experts unanimously point out that in the nearest future the Polish training market will experience significant changes, and the most successful firms will be those which provide the highest level of services (HRP, 2014).

## 2.2. Sample

The study sample consisted of 147 Polish training companies. These companies have been involved in the development, implementation and testing of a dedicated standard for training services. The involvement in the implementation process was the criterion for including a company in the sample.

The selected companies belong to a small group of training companies in Poland that work for the development of the training industry, participate in associations, conferences and projects. It should be noted that the training market in Poland is fragmented. A significant number are single enterprises, run by trainers, that do not plan any development (according to the estimations of the Polish Agency for Entrepreneurship Development, PARP, 60–70% of training companies fall into this category) (PARP, 2013). An overwhelming number of educational organizations belong to micro-enterprises (GUS, 2014). In order to preserve maximum flexibility, these companies employ few workers. Most coaches are not permanent staff, but they perform contract work. The popularization of quality standards in the training industry may facilitate its consolidation, improving the quality requirements for the training and regulation of the market.

The criterion that most differentiates the surveyed companies is their activity on the training market. A large number of planned and provided trainings usually means:

- extensive procedures for the preparation and organization of trainings,
- broader marketing activity,
- attractive and current topics of training,
- possessed or leased premises and hardware,
- a relatively large number of individual and institutional clients.

The surveyed companies were divided into 6 groups, according to the number of training courses. The first group consists of companies that

performed from 6 to 14 training courses within 6 months prior to the survey. This group is diverse. It contains: small organizations in the growth phase, single companies that offer very tightly themed training as well as educational institutions for which training is a non-core activity. In total, they constitute 69% of the sample. Subsequent groups embraced companies that organized respectively 15–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54 and more than 54 trainings within 6 months. The most interesting of them is the last group, which consists of enterprises with the greatest potential. They usually have branches in many Polish cities. As a result, they are able to recruit trainees from all over the country. There are no statistics which allow the examination of the structure of the activity of all training companies in Poland.

### 2.3. Method

The questionnaire addressed to the companies contained 30 questions about the requirements of the standards (ISO 29990, MSUES) and the use of additional methods increasing the quality of LSP management. In the section on the requirements of the standards, the respondents were asked about the impact of their fulfilment on the success of the company and the level of difficulty of their implementation. The responses were recorded on a 5-point scale, where 5 was the maximum grade. In the section on methods, the respondents could indicate the methods used on the list or add unlisted ones.

Ninety-three business representatives filled in the questionnaire. On a preliminary examination, 3 incorrectly filled questionnaires were rejected. Fifty-four companies did not complete the questionnaire. Ninety questionnaires were analysed further (61%).

In the first part of the survey, the respondents were asked to rate 20 issues related to training company management. These issues concerned 9 areas:

- training topics,
- contract review,
- provision of after training support,
- coaches,
- organization of training courses,
- infrastructure,
- monitoring and improvement,
- strategy,
- information and promotional activities.

Each area was described by at least one issue. Each issue was evaluated based on two criteria:

- importance of complying with the requirements for the operation and success of the company,
- degree of difficulty to meet the requirements at the highest level.

For the first criterion, the respondents used a scale from 1 ‘completely irrelevant’ to 5 ‘very important’. For the second, a similar scale was used: from 1 ‘very easy’ to 5 ‘very difficult’.

In the section on management tools, the respondents indicated whether they applied:

- code of ethics,
- management reviews or audits,
- supervision,
- corrective actions,
- methods of improving training,
- training scenarios,
- changes to quality level of training materials.

For each of these management tools, they also assessed their impact on the success of the organization. The respondents also indicated whether they recognized the expectations in terms of learning outcomes, used methods for measuring the effectiveness of learning, and how they used feedback about failures in the educational process. The respondents had the opportunity to choose an answer from the list or enter an unlisted one.

The survey results were analysed statistically. The internal consistency reliability indicator (Cronbach's alpha) for the study was 0.88. Pearson correlation coefficients and significance tests (t–student) between the questions and characteristics of companies were calculated. The structure of answers was analysed, taking into account means, the coefficient of variation, and graphical methods. The results of participant observations were used to interpret the results and draw conclusions.

The surveyed companies implemented the standard in 2013–2014 and were certified in 2014. The research was conducted in the first half of 2015. In order to improve data collection, an electronic questionnaire was used. Access to the questionnaire was limited by access codes assigned to company managers only. The managers were asked to fill out the questionnaires personally. Additional information was gathered by the analysis of audit reports and direct talks with the managers.

#### **2.4. Results**

The training companies have recognized that the key to their success is hiring coaches who have appropriate knowledge, practice and coaching competence. Great importance is also attached to the effective performance of administrative tasks as well as good communication between the administration staff and coaches. Important factors are also: the precise definition of the expectations of each participant as well as having a unique training offer. The respondents indicated that the least important factors for the success of the company are: the development of procedures for an emergency, training schedules, vision and mission, and the provision of additional support for participants after the training course. The small weight attached to the latter two requirements is surprising. The average ratings for the individual issues are presented in Table 1.

No.	Issue	Significance for success
<i>Training topics</i>		
1	Having a unique training offer	4.16
2	Having the most popular topics of training courses in a given period	3.90
3	A wide set of topics of training courses	3.76
<i>Contract review</i>		
4	Precise definition of the expectations of participants in each training course (before beginning)	4.18
<i>Provision of after training support</i>		
5	Providing learners with appropriate training materials	4.07
6	Providing learners with additional support after the training	3.74
<i>Coaches</i>		
7	Coaches with extensive knowledge in the field of training	4.86
8	Coaches with appropriate professional practice in the field of training	4.78
9	Coaches capable of providing training in an interesting way	4.79
<i>Organization of training courses</i>		
10	Effective performance of administrative tasks	4.34
11	Documented procedures for training preparation, evaluation, etc.	3.77
12	Relevant training schedules (training hours, appropriately scheduled breaks, etc.)	3.64
13	Efficient communication between the person responsible for the organization of training and coaches	4.32
<i>Infrastructure</i>		
14	Suitable rooms (adjusted to the specifics of the training and participants)	4.08
15	Suitably equipped rooms (beamer, blackboard, etc.)	3.94
<i>Monitoring and improvement</i>		
16	Suitable methods for monitoring the quality of training (analysis of customer satisfaction, class inspections, etc.)	3.94
17	Readiness for an emergency	3.54
18	Cyclical undertaking of actions to improve training methods	3.90
<i>Strategy</i>		
19	Vision and mission of the organization	3.56
<i>Information and promotional activities</i>		
20	High level of information and promotional activity	3.81

Tab. 1. Significance of meeting requirements. Source: the authors' own study.



The respondents stated that the most difficult was the fulfilment of the following requirements:

- having a unique training offer,
- high level of information and promotional activity,
- cyclical undertaking of actions to improve training methods,
- coaches capable of providing training in an interesting way.

The average ratings for the individual issues are presented in Table 2. It should be noted, however, that most of the requirements analysed by the respondents were considered easy to implement. Eleven out of 20 issues were assessed at less than 2.5. The respondents recognized that the easiest to implement were:

- suitably equipped rooms,
- providing learners with appropriate training materials,
- effective performance of administrative tasks,
- suitable rooms,
- efficient communication between the person responsible for the organization of training and coaches.

No.	Issue	Assessment of difficulty
<i>Training topics</i>		
1	Having a unique training offer	3.08
2	Having the most popular topics of training courses in a given period	2.50
3	A wide set of topics of training courses	2.67
<i>Contract review</i>		
4	Precise definition of the expectations of participants in each training course (before beginning)	2.64
<i>Provision of after training support</i>		
5	Providing learners with appropriate training materials	2.08
6	Providing learners with additional support after the training	2.49
<i>Coaches</i>		
7	Coaches with extensive knowledge in the field of training	2.42
8	Coaches with appropriate professional practice in the field of training	2.60
9	Coaches capable of providing training in an interesting way	2.73
<i>Organization of training courses</i>		
10	Effective performance of administrative tasks	2.11
11	Documented procedures for training preparation, evaluation, etc.	2.49
12	Relevant training schedules (training hours, appropriately scheduled breaks, etc.)	2.21
13	Efficient communication between the person responsible for the organization of training and coaches	2.20

Tab. 2 cont.

No.	Issue	Assessment of difficulty
<i>Infrastructure</i>		
14	Suitable rooms (adjusted to the specific of training and participants)	2.13
15	Suitably equipped rooms (beamer, blackboard, etc.)	2.01
<i>Monitoring and improvement</i>		
16	Suitable methods for monitoring the quality of training (analysis of customer satisfaction, class inspections, etc.)	2.37
17	Readiness for an emergency	2.62
18	Cyclical undertaking of actions to improve training methods	2.73
<i>Strategy</i>		
19	Vision and mission of the organization	2.46
<i>Information and promotional activities</i>		
20	High level of information and promotional activity	2.73

Tab. 2. Difficulty of meeting requirements. Source: the authors' own study.

The representatives of training companies who were surveyed, when asked about additional methods and techniques enabling the success of the organization, mainly indicated the improvement of teaching methods and training materials. Fewer respondents mentioned the use of corrective actions and supervision. In contrast, the least important were considered: the preparation of training scenarios, management reviews and audits, and a code of ethics. It should be noted that respondents from larger companies more often recognize the importance of supervision. The correlation between company size and the assessment of the importance of supervision was 0.317 at  $p = 0.002$ .

Methods and techniques	Significance for success
Code of ethics	2.98
Management reviews and audits	3.42
Supervision	3.78
Corrective actions	3.84
Methods of improving training	4.18
Training scenarios	3.53
Changes to quality level of training materials	4.09

Tab. 3. Significance of implementing additional methods and techniques. Source: the authors' own study.

### 3. Analysis of Correlations

An analysis of the correlation revealed the existence of three statistically significant relationships between the size of training companies and:

- suitably equipped rooms ( $c = 0.259$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ),
- suitable methods for monitoring the quality of training ( $c = 0.304$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ),
- vision and mission of the organization ( $c = 0.304$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ).

Companies with a smaller scale of activity do not usually have their own rooms, or they use private rooms adapted for training. Such behaviour is economically justified. However, the experience of larger companies suggests that appropriate equipment is positively correlated with their success. This relation is not obvious, considering that the basic equipment in large and small training companies is similar (beamer, computer, whiteboard, flipchart, tables, chairs, etc.). The rooms differ primarily in size, design, the quality of the equipment, and therefore the impression exerted on the customers.

Larger companies are more likely to appreciate the use of methods for monitoring the quality of training. They usually employ more coaches, which makes the simple methods of monitoring ineffective. In the case of the smallest companies, supervision is usually reduced to a minimum because the coach is also the company owner. Based on the research results, it cannot be stated whether an increase in the scope of monitoring in small firms would contribute to their success.

Large companies appreciate the vision and mission of the organization as one of the sources of their success. Not setting goals is one of the barriers to the development of small enterprises. Studies of Polish small and micro-enterprises show that many of them neither determine goals nor implement them in a planned manner. Micro-enterprises often spread their resources over various projects to increase the probability of their survival. However, when resources are scarce, success usually requires orientation on one core field of development. A decision to develop strategic documents that guide the development of the company increases the chances of success in the chosen field.

In the group of issues concerning criteria for success, two strong correlations were found:

- documented procedures for training and having relevant training schedules ( $c = 0.751$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ),
- having suitable rooms and suitably equipped rooms ( $c = 0.788$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The first of these correlations refers to administrative matters. Enterprises that recognize the importance of advanced training procedures also usually recognize the importance of developing training schedules. Both of these sources of success are linked to formalization, which explains the presence of the correlation. The level of formalization is usually associated with the ways of running a business, and less with its size. The correlation

between having suitable rooms and their equipment is not surprising. These two factors are naturally treated by the managers as strongly interlinked.

Three issues linked to training topics (having a unique training offer, having the most popular topics of training courses in a given period and a wide set of topics of training courses) showed no significant correlation with the other issues. Therefore, the managers do not link the subject of training with a good knowledge of customer requirements and ensuring adequate coaching staff. According to quality literature, the subject of training should be based on understanding customer expectations. However, the answers given by the respondents seem to deny that. Presumably, some training companies obtain ideas for training topics in a different way, for example through an analysis of competitors' offers. Company managers probably assume that in the case of new training topics they will have to employ new coaches with certain competences. It is significant that those issues are regarded as less important criteria for the success of the organization than the coaches.

A low level of correlation was also found between the precise definition of the expectations of participants in each training course and the other criteria. This may mean that the managers only declare the importance of customer requirements, but in practice they rely on their own experience and possessed resources. That situation should not be assessed as wrong in all cases. Customers, before training begins, are in many cases not able to define their requirements, and if they do, it is usually with regard to the conditions of the training, and less often the merits. Whether customers will actually obtain the knowledge and skills they need largely depends on the professionalism of the training company. This underlines the importance of regular external and internal monitoring of training quality.

A group of issues related to coaches (coaches with extensive knowledge in the field of training, coaches with appropriate professional practice in the field of training, coaches capable of providing training in an interesting way) is not correlated with the other issues. The managers view it as the most important for success. The coach is the most important asset of the training company. Companies can take on different strategies, use different methods of organizing training courses and use different ways of acquiring customers. However, the main pillar of success of the LSP will invariably be the coach. The independence of the coach role from the strategy and methods of company management is the most probable cause of the low correlation with the other issues.

A significant correlation was found between organizational and technical issues, such as having documented procedures, having suitable rooms, suitably equipped rooms, cyclical undertaking of actions to improve training methods, and high level of information and promotional activity. At the same time, three of them show a correlation with company size (discussed earlier). Companies try to introduce technical and organizational improve-

ments in parallel so as to maintain the consistency of the organization. Therefore, these correlations are not surprising.

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusions**

The managers of training companies, who were surveyed, agreed that compliance with the requirements presented in the standards dedicated to training companies contributes to success on the market. The average result of meeting the requirements for success amounted to 4.06 (on a scale of 1–5, where 5 is maximum). In this respect, hypothesis 1 is confirmed. It should be noted that, according to managers' opinions, the requirements associated with ensuring quality staff are relatively low in both the described standards. They do not limit entrepreneurial behaviours and are compatible with business models of LSPs. They are further described in the MSUES standards, which define the minimum requirements for coaches. In contrast, ISO 29990 only requires the identification of such requirements. None of the standards addresses the issues related to the methodology behind the training design. Therefore, there is visible room for improvement in both standards.

The managers agreed that implementing the requirements of dedicated standards does not create significant difficulties for training companies. The average level of difficulty was rated at 2.46. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is confirmed. Only in one case was the level of difficulty greater than half the scale (3.08). Conducting market analyses, identifying the needs and creating a unique offer represent problems for small- and medium-sized training companies. They do not have the appropriate resources, tools, methods or competence. The training offer is largely based on orders from customers, intuition and an analysis of competitors' offers. In this issue, the requirements of ISO 29990 relate primarily to the provision of reliable information for customers. On the contrary, MSUES highlight the need for studying external sources to identify potential training topics.

The representatives of training companies found that the use of an audit, management review and corrective actions moderately affect the success of the organization. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is not confirmed. Most companies declared the use of management reviews, audits, corrective actions or similar methods. The managers do not treat quality management tools as providing a competitive advantage but appreciate their effectiveness in managing the company. They are, therefore, 'must haves' in the training industry rather than a key factor for success. When responding to questions about improvement methods, the managers pointed mainly to the improvement of training methods, and less to the improvement of the management of the company.

The size of the training company was correlated with only three requirements of the standards: the equipment of rooms, the methods of quality monitoring, the formulation of vision and mission. In other cases, the cor-

relations were statistically insignificant. This means that hypothesis 4 is confirmed. Small training companies have difficulty in ensuring adequate equipment. Their owners make all the decisions and supervise the operation of the companies, so they do not feel the need for enhanced monitoring or for the formulation of a mission. This explains the occurrence of these weak correlations.

Studies have shown that the managers of training companies recognize the importance of the application of the management techniques described in these standards. They consider them factors that may transform a company into a successful organization. At the same time, however, the standards are associated, based on previous experience, with bureaucratisation and excessive formalization. This reduces the interest in their implementation. It should be noted that neither the ISO 29990 nor MSUES requires extensive documentation and additional tasks are not labour intensive. These standards are well suited to the specifics of the training industry. Before the implementation of the standard, many managers were focused on the quality of training only, not the quality of the management in the whole company. Due to the implementation, greater emphasis was put on the quality of management, which was positively reflected in the effectiveness of the organization.

The study helped to indicate not only the strengths but also the weaknesses of the standards. The main problem is the lack of recognition of the standards among customers. This applies to both corporate and individual clients. In order to disseminate the standards, informational actions are required. Otherwise, they will remain niche solutions. Standards can be used to regulate the market, for example by using them as a criterion while granting subsidies. That solution was adopted in Poland in the case of MSUES, which helped to increase interest in the standard significantly.

Industry standards require a reference to the specifics of the industry. At the same time, a too deep definition of the requirements may cause a reduction in the flexibility of companies. In the industries where entrepreneurial approach is essential for success of the company, too much standardization can harm development. The level of detail in both the discussed standards is appropriate. The only area where it would be useful to extend the requirements is the methodology of the training design. This issue, as noted in the first part of this article, has been well described in literature. Therefore, it would be possible to introduce the basic principles of training design to the requirements of the standards.

The main limitation of the study is the small sample size. Only 1.5% of Polish training companies were analysed. An analysis of learning service providers in other countries was not possible. It should be also noted that the results are based on managers' opinions. This approach was chosen due to the multiplicity of factors that affect the success of organizations, which limits the possibility of using methods that are more precise.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The OECD defined three types of learning in 1996. Formal learning is structured, intentional and has defined learning objectives. It is usually related to schools, colleges, universities or vocational training. Informal learning is the opposite: it is unintentional, it has no structure. Informal learning occurs, for example, during leisure time, at home, at work. The third and the least precisely defined is non-formal learning, which manifests some attributes of both types defined earlier. It allows learning service providers to present a more flexible attitude to learning processes. The definition of non-formal learning differs depending on the legislation of the countries. Adult learning should mostly belong to non-formal learning (OECD, 2015).
- <sup>2</sup> A detailed comparison between both standards was presented in Rogala and Wawak, 2015.

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### **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank the Regional Labour Office in Cracow for allowing the studies to be performed.