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THE QUALITY MEASUREMENT OF MANAGEMENT IN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Abstract. Evaluation of quality management in local self-government can be done in several ways. One way is evaluating the implementation of the quality standards in municipal offices, but these standards are relatively rarely used in Slovakia. Another way is quality management evaluating through inhabitants and their opinion. Inhabitants are recipients of services that local self-government provides and offers, so their opinion and perception is also important. The contribution shows results of the evaluation of self-government management quality (the Council Members and a mayor) and employees of municipal offices. The achieved results showed, that inhabitants except from mayors and council members good communication skills, openness, willingness to listen to them. The municipality officers should be responsible, trained and willing to help solve the problems.

Keywords: quality; management; local self-government management; mayor; council; employees of municipal offices.

JEL Classification: H7, H11, H83

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ОЦІНКА ЯКОСТІ МЕНЕДЖМЕНТУ В ОРГАНАХ МІСЦЕВОГО САМОВРЯДУВАННЯ У СЛОВАЦЬКІЙ РЕСПУБЛІЦІ

Анотація. Оцінити якість менеджменту в органах місцевого самоврядування можна декількома способами: по-перше, шляхом визначення ступеня впровадження стандартів якості в муніципальні посади, що у Словаччині є поодиноким явищем; по-друге, через виявлення думки жителів як споживачів послуг на можливості місцевої влади забезпечувати задоволення суспільних потреб. У статті зосереджено увагу переважно на другому підході, що був узятий за основу для оцінки якості менеджменту органів самоврядування (члени Ради і мер) та співробітників муніципальних офісів. Із цією метою авторами проведено вивчення сприйняття місцевими жителями знань керівників і представників місцевої влади, їхнього досвіду, навичок, відкритості, бажання спілкуватися і допомагати розв'язувати проблеми.

Ключові слова: якість; менеджмент; місцеве самоврядування; мер; місцева рада; співробітники муніципалітетів.

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ОЦЕНКА КАЧЕСТВА МЕНЕДЖМЕНТА В ОРГАНАХ МЕСТНОГО САМОУПРАВЛЕНИЯ В СЛОВАЦКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКЕ

Аннотация. Оценить качество менеджмента в органах местного самоуправления можно несколькими способами: во-первых, путем определения степени внедрения стандартов качества в муниципальные должности, что в Словакии является относительно редким явлением; во-вторых, через выявление мнения жителей как получателей услуг на возможности местной власти обеспечивать удовлетворение общественных потребностей. В статье сосредоточено внимание преимущественно на втором подходе, который был взят за основу для оценки качества менеджмента органов самоуправления (члены Совета и мэр) и сотрудников муниципальных офисов. С этой целью авторами проведено изучение восприятия местными жителями знаний руководителей и представителей местной власти, их опыта, способностей, навыков, открытости, желания общаться и помогать решать проблемы.

Ключевые слова: качество; менеджмент; местное самоуправление; мэр; местный совет; сотрудники муниципалитетов.

Introduction. The success of the organization on the market is conditioned by competent managers and the quality of products or services which it produces. Quality Management has determined the general requirements that are applicable to all organizations, regardless of their field of activity. The basic requirement according to Mateides A. et al. (2006) [1], however is, that the organization in accordance with standards would establish, document, implement and maintain a quality management system and continually it improves its effectiveness. Application of quality systems in the organization depends on the managers, their knowledge, skills and responsibility for the success activity of the organization. How to assess the quality of products and services is extensively described in the relevant standards and quality models. Another situation occurs when we are interested in assessment of quality of management as a process and quality of management as a group of people, which performs management process, especially in organizations producing public services and of which management is directly elected by the inhabitants. Example of such organizations can be municipality as the basic unit of local self-government.

Brief Literature Overview. According to EN ISO 9000:2001 [2] the quality is defined as the degree to which a set of own characteristics of the product meets the requirements, the own characteristics are permanent characteristics (mechanical, chemical, biological), compared with existing characteristics assigned (price, owner, etc.). The ISO 9000 series developed by the International Organization of Standards since 1987 is an international standard accepted for quality assurance in the field of production and service provision, which offers indicators and positions regarding the manner in which a quality system is elaborated within an organization. The series consists of instructions for using the standard (ISO 9000) and requirements for the organizational processes specified for the organizations performing different activities [3].

A. Mateides et al. (2006) [4] understands the quality of service «as the ability of a service provider to establish the complicity of customer desired output according to specific customer expectations, on him required level». F. Ochraňa and M. Pucek (2011) [5] define quality in public administration most often as a measure of fulfillment of the legitimate demands of the customers on required public service or citizens on the quality of life in the municipality or region. «Quality» is a generic concept and it is not new in public administration, either. On the contrary, quality was, at least implicitly, a public administration concept since the creation of the modern administrative state, when it was associated with the observance of regulations and procedures, with formal correctness, viability and absence of arbitrary decisions [6].

Evaluation of quality of service provision by local self-government is quite difficult, because the quality management systems apply only a small percentage of municipal self-governments in Slovakia. Quality in local self-government can be judged from several aspects. One is the quality of the self-government management, namely elected authorities and executives and their characteristics (personal, professional, practical experience and responsibility towards the position they hold). The second aspect is the quality of services provided by local self-government within or beyond the statutory competencies. A third aspect is the citizens' satisfaction with providing the requested service.

In assessing the quality of in local self-government, according to E. Balazova and V. Papcunova (2008) [7], raises one more fact: the citizens (the clients) are not interested in the performance of a particular municipal office but rather they are interested in access of officers, their professionalism, communication skills, willingness to help and explain required information. J. Tej and H. Simkova (2010) [8] write that the offices are at constant pressure of voters, especially because the financing of public administration bodies is dependent on the finances of taxpayers (tax burden of government) and everyone who comes into contact with any level of public administration required «for his money» adequate service. For elected officials they pursue development of the community in terms of avail-

ability of basic municipal services (public lighting functionality, quality of roads, provision of drinking water, waste disposal, safety, order) or in terms of services, enhancing the quality of life in the village (the ability to attract potential investors and job opportunities, a range of sporting and cultural activities. aspect of quality should be taken into account in all decisions the self-government management, which in turn significantly affect the professional and personal characteristics and elected executives (quality of self-government managers).

G. Wright and J. Nemec (2003) [9] write that the assessment of the quality of public services is especially important tool for the management of municipalities because it ensures compliance with quality standards, it helps in assessing the officials themselves (control aspect) and it is also used to create the quality objectives and their comparison with existing standards or potential competition (improvement perspective).

Purpose. To highlight the perception of quality managers and officers of local self-government from the view of citizens, through perception of characteristics, access and activity of directly elected local self-government representatives and employees of municipal offices.

Methodology. The elected representatives represent the municipality outwardly, define its development concept, adopt development policy of the municipality and at the same time also implement the decisions about the use of municipal financial resources or managing of municipal property. Assessment of municipal offices employees were included on the grounds that the performance of specific decisions is just realized by officers, so inhabitants come for those officers and deal with them more often than with the elected representatives of municipalities. Assessment approach and activity of municipalities' representatives and officials we conducted through a questionnaire survey among residents. For data collection, we used a questionnaire survey. The research was conducted in the months from October to December 2011, which was one year after the last municipal elections, and the people have been able to assess how work elected representatives of local governments and the staff local government offices. The sample consisted of people from different sized municipalities from several parts of Slovakia. Respondents were contacted at random. In the research sample were by 442 respondents including 344 women (77.8%), 96 men (21.7%) and 2 of them its gender did not response (0.5%). In terms of age structure, the proportion of respondents aged up to 25 years was 26.5%, aged 26-40 years 57.0%, aged 41-55 years 15.6% and aged 56 to 65 years 0.5%.

On survey participated mainly respondents with 1st stage of university studies (406 inhabitants, representing 91.9%). Entirely secondary school graduates had 27 inhabitants (6.1%), only 7 inhabitants had completed university education of 2nd stage.

Results

1. Municipality Council. The municipal council is composed of representatives (Members) elected in direct elections by inhabitants for four years. The term of office of the municipal council shall end taking an oath of the newly elected members of the municipal council. Municipal Council decides on the most important issues of community life (Act 369/90 Coll.). It especially determines the principles of management and disposal of municipal property, approves the municipal budget and its changes, approves important strategic and development documents of municipality, establishes and controls a general business, budgetary and contributory organizations, decides to regulations of municipality, declares a local referendum etc. [11].

The results of the research presented in Figure 1 showed that more than 61.3% of the respondents prefer Members who are educated and from whom they expect more professional solutions to the problems. Also prefer Members who have natural authority (57.5% of respondents) and have some experience in local self-government action (43.7% of respondents). Although in practice is often criterion for selection also family ties to the Member, the results of our survey did not confirm this fact. 42.8% of the respondents said they definitely would not select Members on the basis of family ties. The voters in the selection of Members consider also their credibility (63.8% of

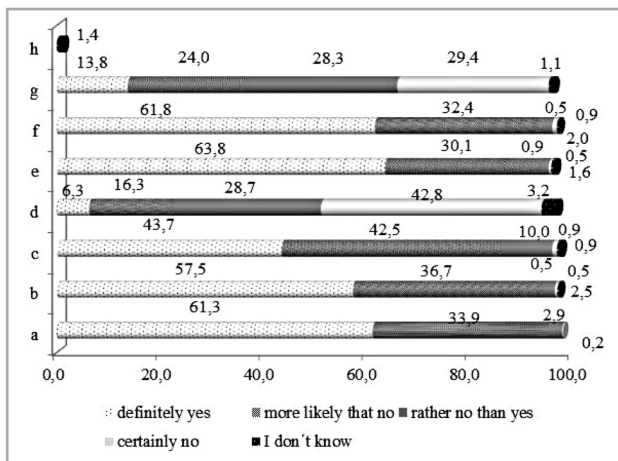


Fig. 1: The criteria taken into account in the choice of the Members (in %)

Source: Own research, own processing

Legend: a - expertise and education, b - the personality of the candidate (authority), c - experiences with the action of the self-government, d - it's my friends/relatives, e - credibility, f - ethical and moral qualities, g - political affiliation, h - other.

the respondents) and their ethical resp. moral qualities (61.8% of respondents). Influence of political power is also reflected at the local level, which is partly a result of the application of the Act no. 346/1990 Coll. on elections to authorities of local self-government where the member candidates propose political parties.

Within the research, it was found that citizens although give their deputy mandate to Memmbers, but after the elections they show little interest in regular meetings with them. This is confirmed by the fact that only 6.8% of respondents meet with Member at regular intervals (see more Figure 2). To 52.3% of respondents said that they do not talk to their council members all. Voters have little interest after the election in their members it was quite difficult for them to assess their satisfaction with the performance of members' duties. To 19.9% of the respondents think that council members uphold the interests of their known/relatives and thus have the personal benefit (14.3% of the population). Despite this fact, respondents perceive positive helpfulness of Members (50.9%, of which 8.8% of respondents said they definitely yes and 42.1% more likely than not) and their ability to listen to citizens and solve their problems (53.4% respondents, of which 9.7% said definitely yes and 43.7% more

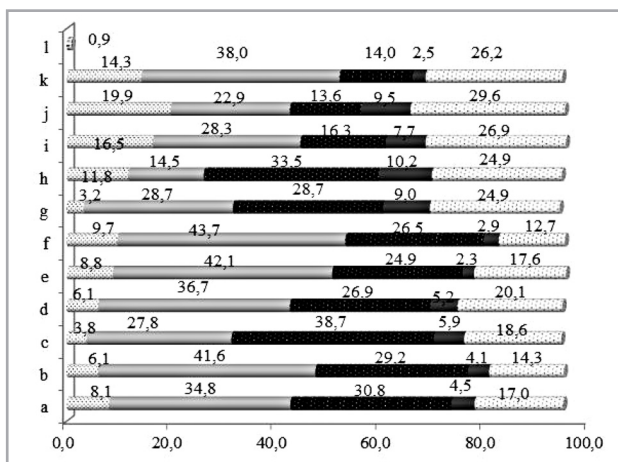


Fig. 2: Perception of approach and work of Members (in %)

Source: Own research, own processing

Legend: a - the way of communication with inhabitants, b - promoting the interests of inhabitants, c - fulfillment the pre-election pledges, d - professional approach to the tasks, e - helpfulness, f - listening to the inhabitants and their needs, g - ability to provide financial resources, h - the ability to attract businesses, i - promoting the interests of his/her relatives, j - personal benefit, k - communication with the Mayor, l - other.

likely than not). In support of their candidatures the candidates use election programs, where primarily indicate their vision. The trend is such that after being elected Members on their program often forget. This is confirmed by the results of the research. According to 44.6% of the respondents Members rather not than yes fulfill election promises. This is closely related to the negative assessment of the fact that Members do not promote the interests of citizens (33.3% of the respondents). They are linked containers, since all candidates before the elections point to public interest resp. needs of citizens and after the elections they often do not fulfill their electoral programs and rather prefer his personal interest or the interests of their relatives or known. Only 42.9% of respondents are satisfied resp. rather satisfied than dissatisfied with the way how Members communicate with citizens. Despite the fact that it is the citizens are the ones who give them their vote in municipal elections and which will become members of the representative corps. It can be assumed that probably the majority of Members after being elected forgets their voters and again they interest in them only before the next local elections.

2. Mayor. Mayor is the municipal representatives and the highest executive body the municipality. Function of mayor is a public function [9]. The mayor is statutory authority of property relations and labor relations. In the administrative legal relationships he is an administrative body.

In the evaluation of their satisfaction with the approach and the work of the mayor (Figure 3) respondents expressed satisfaction with the way how the mayor can listen to citizens and to create conditions for meeting their needs (24.4%), as well as the favor towards the citizens (23.1%) and with the way communication (26.8%). Of the total respondents, only 19.9% think that their mayor is manager and the only 18.6% that he is a leader. Although in deciding 66.3% of respondents (293 people) said that they chose the mayor on the basis skills and education and only 18.3% of them thought that their mayor can take expert opinion on the performance of tasks.

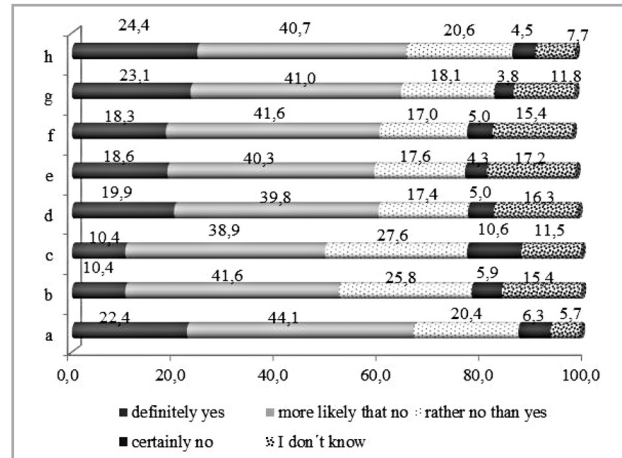


Fig. 3: Satisfaction with the performance of current mayor - Part I (in %)

Source: Own research, own processing

Legend: a - the way of communicating with inhabitants, b - the speed of handling, c - fulfillment of the election pledges, d - ability to manage (as a manager), e - the ability to lead (as a leader), f - professional approach to the tasks, g - helpfulness, h - listening to the inhabitants and their needs.

One of the features of any successful leader and manager is the ability to not only to present outside the municipality, but also the ability of cooperation and communication with the Office staff and Members of the Council. Voters usually see, resp. especially assess the position of the mayor in communication with the public, they are less able to assess objectively the relationship between the mayor and the municipal office staff and Members. These facts are confirmed by the results of research where to 27.6% of respondents do not know whether the mayor communicates with Members, because the residents do not participate in the general meeting council. Also, 26.7% of

them do not know whether the mayor politely communicates with the staff of office. Nevertheless, only 24.2% of respondents believe that their mayor politely communicates with staff of office and 12.7% of the respondents stated that there is a good communication between mayor and Members (Figure 4).

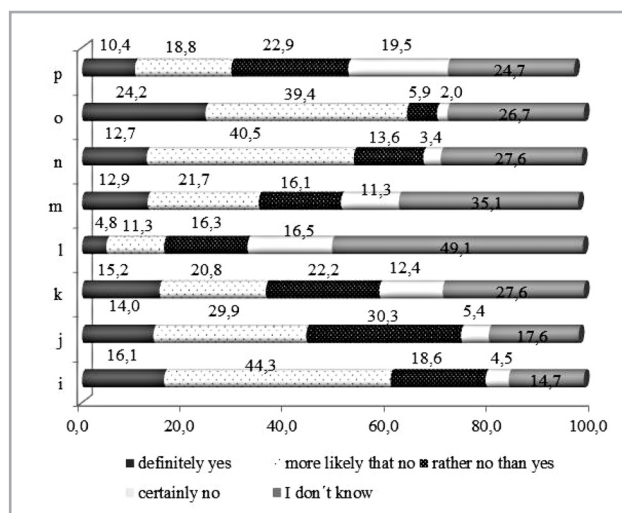


Fig. 4: Satisfaction with the performance of current mayor - Part II (in %)

Source: Own research, own processing

Legend: i - education, j - helpfulness, k - listening to the inhabitants and their needs, l - the ability to provide the financial resources, m - the ability to attract businesses, n - transparency, o - higher employment engagement, p - good communication with Members of Municipal Council.

Although 64.9% of respondents choose their candidates on the basis of ethical and moral qualities, 4.8% of respondents think that their mayor takes bribes. Almost half of respondents (49.1%) on this issue could not comment. Linked to this is subsequently also the attitude of respondents to the personal benefit of the mayor. 12.9% of the respondents believe that the mayor prefers personal benefit to the public interest, even 21.7% say he prefers the personal benefit rather than not.

3. Employees of municipal offices. The research results showed that the respondents rather positive than negative evaluated way of communicating with citizens (Figure 5). To 22.6% of respondents are satisfied and 48.2% are more satisfied than dissatisfied how to treat them office staff, when they come to them to solve their problems. Respondents positively evaluated the liability, professional approach to solving their problems and staff helpfulness.

Respondents also evaluated whether officers have the personal benefit from the work in the office resp. take a bribe for

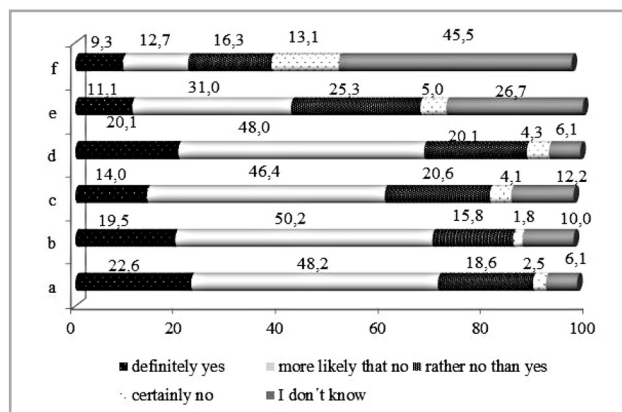


Fig. 5: Evaluation of employees of the municipal office (in %)

Source: Own research, own processing

Legend: a - the way of communicating with inhabitants, b - a responsible approach to the tasks, c - the expertise, d - helpfulness, e - personal benefit from work at the office, f - not ashamed to take the bribe.

quicker solving of the problem. Only 5.0% of respondents believe that workers have no personal benefit from the work of the office. 26.7% of them did not answer this question and only 42.1% of respondents think that the Office's employees have personal benefit from the work of the office. Interesting is the fact that only 45.5% of respondents could not say whether employees would be able to take a bribe. From this evaluation, it is possible to deduce that these respondents apparently in contact with the Office did not offer a bribe to staff of the Office. A positive is the fact that 29.4% of respondents believe that they would be definitely not successful with bribery. 22.0% of respondents believe resp. indicated that more likely than not would be able to accept the office employees bribe for preferential solve their problem.

Conclusions. The quality of provided services depends on the quality of managers who perform in local self-government management process. Evaluation and assessment of their quality is in practice quite difficult, because their decisions about production and provision of specific public services, combining several aspects. One is the view of the inhabitants - voters which depends on their requirements, the urgency of the need for a specific service or their expectations. The results of the research aimed at perception of the quality of municipal managers from the perspective of residents showed that:

1st: for Members of municipal councils play an important role their education, natural authority and experience with their action in the local self-government. However, after elected to office by the voters prevalent is feeling that members favor their interests, or prefer their relatives. On the other hand, respondents positively evaluate Members helpfulness and willingness to tackle problems in the municipality.

2nd: In the evaluation of the work of the mayor as the highest statutory representative of the municipality, respondents positively evaluated the effort to listen to citizens and interest to solve their problems. Also, they expressed satisfaction with the way the mayor's communication with citizens.

3rd: Employees of municipal offices, who every day come into contact with citizens, are perceived by the respondents rather positively. Respondents appreciated the efforts of professional problem solving of citizens. However, the responsibility of solving the tasks assigned to take a neutral stance. Similar observation was also encountered in evaluating the treatment to citizens and ways of communication, citizens are more positively reviewed staff as negative.

Providing and offering quality services by local self-government depends on the quality of self-managers, their knowledge, skills and responsibility for the successful operating of the organization.

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