

Development Of Quality Management In Public Administration In The Republic Of Slovenia - A Case Study

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INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Slovenia is a Central-European country, with two million inhabitants. Slovenia gained independence in 1991 and is celebrating its twentieth independence day in the year 2011. Since the independence, the Slovenian government has put substantial efforts in reforming its economy and public administration. By the end of 1992, Slovenia obtained international recognition, strengthened its own currency and started economic and social reform. Parallel to economic progress, a professional institutional framework needed to be developed, as a precondition for further development of the country. One of the main priorities of Slovenia's foreign policy since the beginning was the full European Union (EU) membership, which substantially influenced the development of its economic and also administrative system. Slovenia became a member of the EU in May 2004, in 2007, Euro as national currency was introduced, and in the first semester of 2008, Slovenia already held the Presidency of the Council of the EU. Slovenia's GDP in 2009 was 17.331 EUR and reached about 86 % of the EU-27 GDP average (Statistical office, 2011). Strong influence for the development of its administrative system and quality management in public administration had Slovenia's process of accession to the European Union. This process started as early as in 1996, by signing the EU Association Agreement. An exhaustive list of laws and other regulations needed to be adopted with a view to aligning Slovenia's legal system with the *Acquis*. Key reforms had to be carried out, and institutions had to be established. In respect to national public administration systems, the European Union never prescribed their organizations. However, it demanded the capacity and preparedness of each member state to contribute to collective decision-making and then to follow the common rules and procedures. Each EU member state, therefore, needs to provide efficient functioning of all its institutions and processes, effective implementation of common rules, as well as provide a homogeneous level of quality and efficiency of public services (Nicolaidis, 2003).

APPROACH TO QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Intensive development in the area of quality in Slovene public administration was observed, especially from the year 1999, when the Quality Committee was established at the Ministry of the Interior. The main purpose of its activity was defined as an *efficient, citizen friendly, recognizable and responsible public administration*. In 2002, quality became one of the main pillars of the Slovenian public administration reform, the main focus being on a customer-friendly service, accountability of public administration bodies to the public for their results, efficient functioning, and awareness of the role of the management in it. Development of quality in Slovene public administration was given an additional impulse with the establishment of the Ministry of Public Administration in December 2004. On the other hand, the main responsibility for quality of actions and services under their jurisdiction rests with the bodies of public administration, which are also responsible for achievement of results. Principles of legality, of legal certainty and legitimate expectations and pursuant legal principles, are important part of their performance, since it is impossible to achieve quality in public administration without integrating these principles in their daily performance. General approach to quality management (QM) in Slovenian public administration can be characterized with the combination of 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches.

The 'top down' approach is being used, in particular, in the activities of the Ministry of public administration and directions of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. It is aimed at (co)-preparation of different strategic and development documents relating to the quality of performance of Slovene administration, development of joint basis,

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methodological tools and frameworks, as well as the institutionalization of good practices and quality standards into the legislation. The Ministry of Public Administration constantly incorporates principles of quality into different strategic documents and initiatives, such as, for example, e-administration or removal of administrative burdens.

The '*bottom up*' approach denotes activities in the introduction of quality management systems into individual public administration organizations. Foremost, it relates to the introduction of quality management systems according to ISO 9000 standards, or according to principles of business excellence, for example, CAF and EFQM. In the environments where more managerial and organizational knowledge is present, other organizational models are used as well. It should be stated that public administration organizations decide independently for themselves. However, it is expected that whichever road to quality improvement they choose, they will be proactive in their approach. The public administration organizations in general follow the strategy of '*incremental adjustment*' - it means that the changes in an organization are introduced according to the step by step method. This strategy follows a rational approach, is based on a continuity and continuous adjustment of basic competencies and processes of the organization. It leads towards a learning organization and supports the total quality management principles.

INCORPORATION OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN STRATEGIC PROGRAMMES AND INITIATIVES

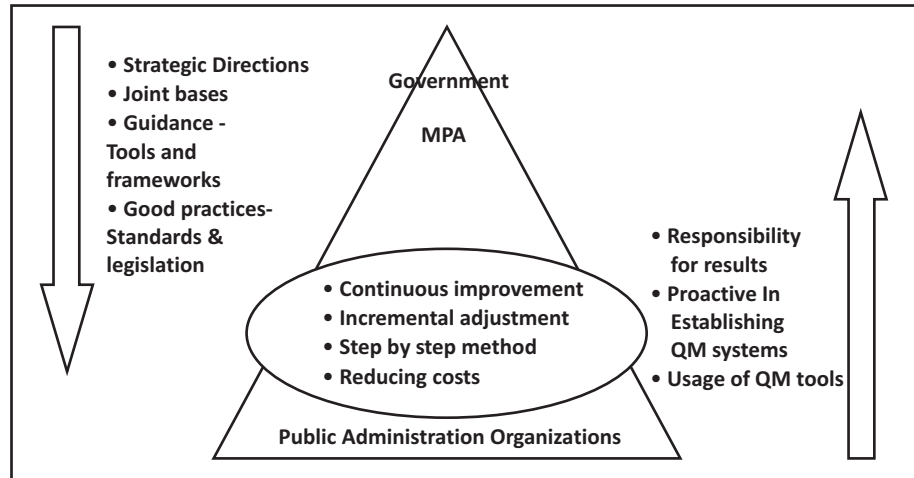
In Slovenia, quality of public services has been on the developmental agenda since the early years. Already in 1993, the National quality programme of the Republic of Slovenia was adopted as a fundamental document and guidance for achieving the long-term goal - excellent quality. In 1996, Quality policy of state administration was adopted, and in 2002, quality became one of the main pillars of Slovenian public administration reform. The Ministry of public administration has been incorporating the demands and quality performance standards of Slovenian public administration in legislation, and in all strategic documents which it prepares or co-operates in their preparation. The main goals in respect to quality public services are: to put the customer at the centre, to improve efficiency, to reduce costs, to simplify administrative processes, and to make contacts between customers and the state easier and less frequent. At least, the following documents in this respect are to be mentioned: Slovenia's Development Strategy (2005), Reform programme for achieving the Lisbon strategy goals (2005), e-Government strategy 2006 - 2010 (2006), Programme of measures for reduction of administrative burdens, Resolution on national developmental projects for the period 2007 to 2023 (2006), and others. In the year 2008, Slovenia and all other EU countries as well as EU as a whole started dealing with financial and economic crisis challenges. Already in 2008, Slovenia started adopting measures, which focused on short-term effects, while in connection to joint agreements and EU guidelines, Slovenia also dealt with middle- and long-term measures. The process of including Slovenia in OECD, as well as the inclusion itself in 2010, has contributed to the long-term aspects of the state's development. For more effective operation of markets as well as the public administration system, institutional adjustments have been foreseen as a part of the Exit Strategy, a document from February 2010. Furthermore, in 2010, Slovenia started the preparation of the Slovenian national reform program, in the context of the new Europe 2020 strategies. Among several other strategic documents, two are to be mentioned additionally: e-Government development strategy (2009) with the e-Government Action Plan 2010 - 2015 (2010), and the '*SIMPLE RULES!*' program (2009) for eliminating administrative barriers and reducing administrative burdens by 25% by 2012. It is important to mention that new strategic documents on quality in excellence in the Republic of Slovenia are being prepared in order to additionally support competitiveness of the national economy and the role of the state and its administration in this respect.

THE MAIN QUALITY MANAGEMENT AREAS OF ACTIVITIES IN SLOVENE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

As described earlier, within the approach to the QM in Slovene PA and illustrated in Figure 1, there are several areas of activities that the Ministry of Public Administration (MPA) performs and supports in respect to quality public services. Some of them are presented more in detail.

✳ **Common Assessment Framework CAF :** Since 2002, when it was introduced in Slovenia, Common Assessment Framework (CAF) was defined as strategic direction in Slovenian public administration modernization and was incorporated in different strategic documents and/or initiatives. Already in 2003, CAF was included in the *Further*

Figure 1: Approach To Quality Management In Slovene Public Administration



Development Strategy of the Slovenian Public Sector 2003-2005, within the first seven priority tasks in the area of *Quality management within administration and orientation of public administration towards users*. In *Slovenia's Development Strategy (2005)*, under the action plan for 2005 and 2006, under the third development priority - *An efficient and less costly state*, CAF was exposed together with the EFQM model, as a tool for systematically raising the quality of the public administration services. Promotion and methodological support to CAF is related to several activities conducted by the Ministry of Public Administration: spreading information on CAF and the methodology itself, CAF publications, CAF web page, and methodological support such as forms for self-assessment or providing information and measurements to support the 'Results' side of the CAF model. In respect to the achieved development of quality management and the maturity level of the system of public administration, new emphasis is given in relation to using the Common Assessment Framework for strengthening the administrative capacity for quality management in public administration organizations. In November 2010, a project for strengthening administrative capacity for quality improvements on the bases of Common Assessment Framework (CAF EPI) was launched, and was also supported by the European Structural Funds. The project is aimed in upgrading the existing usage of CAF by establishing the system for providing external feedback to the CAF users, leading into obtaining the 'Effective CAF User' label. At the Ministry of public administration, the whole organizational structure to support the CAF EPI project is being established, together with the pool of experts.

✿ **Customers And Employees' Satisfaction Surveys :** Methodologies to test satisfaction of customers and employees in Administrative Units were developed in the year 2000, under the auspices of the Quality Committee. Both methodologies were primarily developed to support the implementation of quality management systems in Administrative Units. In 2002, annual measuring of customer satisfaction became obligatory for the public administration organizations, after it was tested in fourteen Administrative Units in 2001. Thus, from the year 2002, all Administrative Units performed an annual assessment of customer satisfaction; and comparative data is available for the same on the website of the Ministry of Public Administration. In the year 2006, monthly assessment of customer satisfaction was introduced (being in use until the end of 2010), the so-called "*quality barometer*", whose purpose is an even faster response by public administration bodies to the feedback information of their customers. In 2011, the new set of questionnaires was offered to all interested public administration organizations: for yearly customer satisfaction, for periodical (monthly, quarterly) customer satisfaction, and questionnaire for gaining the feedback information between public administration bodies, aiming in improving quality of relations and interactions within the public administration system.

✿ **Training :** In 2002, the Quality Committee defined the content of training for quality in PA based upon the necessary competences for quality. On that base, the Administrative Academy (AA) offered a set of seminars, which are constantly updated and supplemented accordingly to the raising of QM maturity level in Slovenian public administration. Topic on QM was introduced in the training programme for top managers, which is obligatory training for all the highest managerial positions in the administration. In April 2011, a new training program entitled

as MEMO (Management of Modern Organizations) was launched. It is designed in a form of regular monthly thematic workshops, short - in duration, of three hours, for small coherent working groups of 15 - 20 participants, and focused on prompt consideration of the most relevant topics that contribute to increasing individual and organizational competencies for continuous improvement in PA. Another training form for QM in PA that was intensified in 2010 was training through QM projects. The aim of this kind of training is to strengthen the administrative capacity to QM in Slovene PA and to contribute to stability of the system by additionally supporting continuous improvement in public administration.

✿ **Annual Quality Conferences** : Annual quality conferences of the Ministry of public administration proved as a powerful tool for organizational learning through the exchange of good practices and - by the means of recognition-contribution to the transfer of knowledge and experience in Slovenian public administration. Annual quality conferences are being organized since 2001, and good practices represented their important part, especially in the period 2002 - 2009. Between 2002 and 2009, the gathering of good practices for the conference has been carried out in the form of a public invitation; public administration organizations competed among themselves to be a part of the conference's program and to receive the *Good Practice* award. Selection of cases based on the public invitation included a definition of criteria for the evaluation of received applications; these criteria were modified annually according to the current goals of the Republic of Slovenia. This approach was not a coincidence, since the intention was to identify and promote those good practices that have the largest influence for achievement of goals of the Republic of Slovenia, with regard to the efficiency of performance by public administration organizations and quality of public services. In 2010, the approach in this respect was changed as transfer of good practices has been internalized to the extent that more specialized forms to support further good practices transfers were established: specialized good practices conference in police sector, specialized good practices conference in judiciary, practicum of good practices in administrative units, etc. Since 2010, annual quality conferences of the MPA are directed into new approaches and themes to provide a new stimulus for further development of quality public services.

✿ **Networking** : Alongside different QM areas of activities, networking of Slovene public administration organizations is well developed. PA organizations are involved into various, usually regionally initiated networks for transfer of knowledge and experiences, such as, for example:

✿ Territorial networking of various entities of public administration, which operate within a certain geographical area and share their common efforts for better quality, efficiency and better work results, some sources and/or customers. Example: administrative centre, a joint committee for quality, local quality clusters, etc.

✿ Undertaking of comparative learning (benchmarking and bench learning) among the same type or organizations of public administration. This type of learning is widespread, as in addition to the identification of the area of improvement, it also encourages the exchange of experiences among the colleagues (peer review) and raising the level of employee satisfaction. Example: directed professional excursion among administrative units.

✿ Comparisons and comparative analyses of the organizations of public administration (of the same type or different), which are undertaken due of their own interest and needs. Example: a comparative survey of some performance indicators due to cooperation in the national quality award competition.

✿ Exchange of knowledge and experiences among the same or different types of organizations by sharing certain experts in different fields. Example: sharing/exchange of internal auditors.

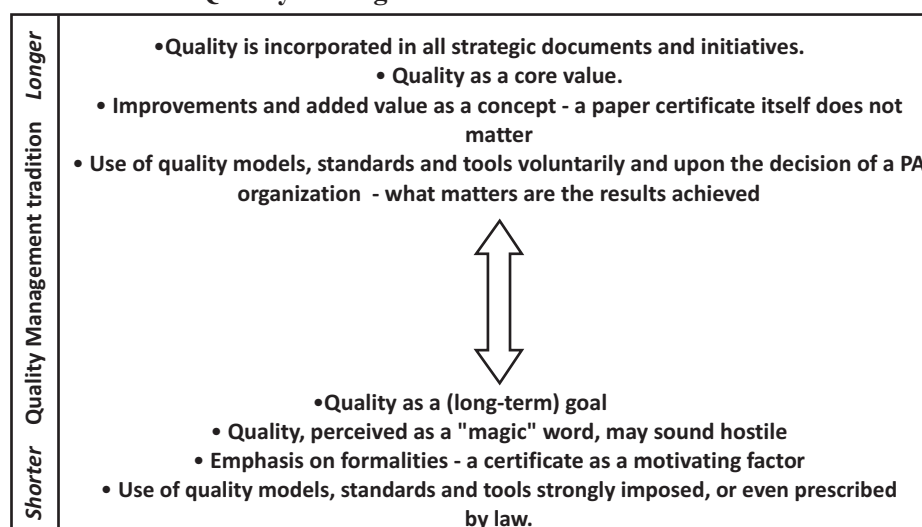
It is important to emphasize that the networking mentioned was established according to the '*bottom up*' approach, upon the demand of interested public administration organizations and upon their own initiative.

RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS OF QM ACTIVITIES IN SLOVENE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

In Slovenian Public Administration, quality management is the most spread in administrative units. There are 58 administrative units in Slovenia, together covering all the territories, and performing state functions at a local level. Administrative units are very close to the citizens - majority of contacts between citizens, and the state are being realized through them. It is, therefore, not a coincidence that administrative units are the most developed part of the state administration in respect to quality of their services. Almost all administrative units (57 out of 58) have developed their quality management systems (QMS); over half of them have developed their QMS according to the

ISO 9000 quality standards, and a great majority of them (over 50) use or have used CAF as a QM tool for continuous improvement, and over 20 administrative units were involved in EFQM related projects - be it through pilot projects or within the official competition process for a national quality award. In regard to other parts of Slovenian public administration, QMS are implemented in about 1/3 of the ministries or their constituent bodies, and in a certain number of municipalities. Within the EU, member states demonstrate different QM development stages in their public administrations - what is connected also to the tradition they have in this respect (**Žurga, 2008**). Figure 2 illustrates characteristics of quality management in public administrations in relation to the tradition they have in the area.

Figure 2: Characteristics Of Quality Management In Public Administrations In Relation To Tradition



Source: Žurga, G. (ed.): Quality management in public administrations of the EU member states (2008: 14)

Results and implications of QM in Slovene public administration are quite in line with the learnings at the EU level. Namely, the main results and consequently, the implications in Slovene public administration can be summarized as follows:

- ✿ Responsibility for the results and strengthening the public management principles in public administration organizations substantially contributed to development of QM systems and quality public services focus;
- ✿ Public managers were encouraged to develop their own QM systems according to their needs, and the maturity achieved, and at their full accountability as none of the approaches, methods or international standards were set as obligatory;
- ✿ Common and well established trends in developing the public administration system is widening the scope from quality to excellence and contributing to strengthening its administrative capacity.

CHALLENGES AND TRENDS FOR QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN SLOVENE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Now-a- days, all public administrations and quality public services are being challenged through several demands and circumstances: social problems and social exclusion due to financial and economic crises, low level of trust on politicians and public institutions, demographic changes, rapid development of information and communication technologies, development of differentiated civil society with new information and communication needs, which demands inclusion in active policy formulation and decision making processes. Key words are sustainable development, sustainable quality and sustainable public administrations (**Pollitt, 2009; Parrado and Löffler, 2010**). New organizational responses and searching for innovation are being explored, such as participation and partnership of all involved; incorporation of new approaches, methods and tools in existing (hierarchical) structures; new space for communication and new forms of communication; shorter feedback loops of practically all activities; creating circumstances to make innovations possible; identifying and establishing room for open concepts and for new solutions connected to risk taking (**Hill, 2008; Metcalfe, 2010**). The current socio- economic situation and functioning

in substantially sharpened circumstances require additional outcomes- and results-orientation of public administrations. In Slovenia, although public management principles and results orientation are present for the last ten years, they had to be substantially strengthened due to the latest developments. In searching for the right balance between making structural changes and daily provision of quality public services, policy co-ordination and co-operation is raising its importance. Synergy can be achieved through co-operation of different actors and their complementaries. The Ministry of public administration has - as ministry in charge - the leading role in further development of quality and business excellence in Slovenian public administration.

CONCLUSION

After over a decade of deliberate work, activities and projects in the area of quality and business excellence in public administration, it has been proved, that the excellence of Slovenian Public Administration is being affirmed as a goal, and quality is one of its central values (Žurga, 2009). In this context, the development of quality management in Slovene public administration is very much in line with the developments and characteristics of quality management in public administrations in the EU. Relevant findings for the case of Slovenia can be exposed as:

(1) In Slovenia, quality has become an indispensable part of public administration development. It is integrated into all strategic or reform documents, by following the basic quality and excellence principles that are now being broadened in public governance and sustainable public administration concepts.

(2) Clear support of the government to the goals in respect to quality public services and quality management in public administration (whereas expert, material, methodological or financial) is evident, supporting the maturity level of individual public administration organizations as well as the public administration system as a whole.

(3) Networking, co-operation and co-ordination is recognized to be absolutely necessary for further quality management development and for adequately supporting competitiveness of the national economy.

QM development in public administration is a never-ending story. Building capacity for innovation in public administration and strengthening the administrative capacity to support the national economy are only two of the possible areas for further investigation and development of quality management in Slovene public administration. This can be concluded not only for Slovenia, but practically for all public administrations that are focused in contributing to further development and prosperity of a country.

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