The Influence of Total Quality Management (TQM) on Public Service Ethics•

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Abstract

Two trends in the practice of modern public administration, the emphasis on ethics and quality, although different as philosophical concepts, influence each other. This paper summarizes what is the Total Quality Management and the Ethics Management, from the Public Service perspective at the European and Romanian level. Public administration reform is a current priority in the context of modernizing the state. At present, there is a growing convergence between the quality and ethical standards regarding the public service provided to citizens. Based on a Total Quality Management tool called Common Assessment Framework - CAF, it is argued the positive influence of this type of management on the ethical conduct of civil servants.

Keywords: *Total Quality Management, ethics, civil service, CAF.*

Presentation of concepts

To associate two concepts, the quality and ethics, is not a hazardous move, but it's certainly an interesting one, especially when referring to management and public administration. The parallel between ethics and quality may be based on the emphasis that each of the two philosophical concepts puts the "good" or "well".

The word "quality" has its origins in the Latin word *"qualitas"* with the following philosophical meaning: *"immediate and immeasurable determination of the nature or way of being of an object, which makes it what it is, and if disappears, to cease to be what is."*[1]

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[1] *Dicţionar enciclopedic* (Encyclopaedic Dictionary)*,* Marcel D. Popa, Alexandru Stănciulescu, Gabriel Florin-Matei, Anicuţa Tudor, Carmen Zgăvărdici and Rodica Chiriacescu, Enciclopedică Publishing House, 1993-2009.

The meanings of the word are of philosophical, technical, economic and social nature. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) defines quality as *"the ensemble of standards and characteristics of a product relative to its ability to satisfy needs that are known or believed."*[2] One of the "fathers" of quality assurance and of Total Quality Management, Joseph M. Juran, American professor of Romanian origin, considers quality as "the ensemble of characteristics of a product that meets customer needs and, thus, makes the product satisfactory."[3]

Quality concerning the goods or services may not be identifiable by a single feature, but only through a set of characteristics and can not be independent because there are only in relation to needs expressed directly or implied of the customers and society. In conclusion, quality is the fact of being "good" in relation to a need.

Ethics is *"the science that deals with the theoretical study of the values and human condition from the perspective of the moral principles and their role in social life; the totality of norms of proper moral conduct; morality."*[4] In essence, the philosophy of ethics is the discipline concerned with what is good and bad, right and wrong.

In what follows, there will be briefly presented some relevant characteristics of the public service ethics and of total quality management, and will be argued the relationship between them and their influences upon each other.

Public Service Ethics

Administrative Science shows that the main instrument by which the public administration acts is represented by the civil servants, as a fundamental human resource of the administrative system. At the same time, the human factor may be the "weak link" in the functioning of public administration at the desired parameters, one of the causes, besides poor training, being the unethical behavior, the moral weakness, as facilitators of the phenomena of corruption.

The main ethical issue related to the civil service, recognized by international bodies and organizations, is corruption. This fact determined major international organizations as the United Nations Organization (Resolution 51/59 "Action against corruption" of the General Assembly of 12 December 1996), the

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[2] I. S. O. 9004-2 norm.

[3] M. J. Juran, *Quality Control Handbook*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1951.

[4] *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române* (Explicative Dictionary of Romanian Language), second edition*,* Romanian Academy, Linguistics Institute "Iorgu Iordan", Univers Enciclopedic Publishing House, 1998.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Council of Europe (Recommendation no. R (2000) 10 on codes of conduct for civil servants of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers of 11 May 2000) to request the governments of the Member States to consider limiting the phenomenon and adopt codes of conduct for civil servants, known in ethics management practice as "ethical codes". In Romania these recommendations have been implemented by the adoption in 2004 of Law no. 7 regarding the Code of conduct for civil servants.

Relevantly for the present study, the main objective of the Code of Conduct is to increase the quality of public service. Another important aspect is asserting, inter alia, as principles governing the professional conduct of civil servants, the public interest priority and professionalism of the civil servants.[5] Society's interest has priority over the interest of the organization and the organization's interest has priority over personal interests.

Professionalism is the term used to describe behavior, goals and qualities that characterize or mark a professional. A "professional" is a person who complies with professional and ethics standards of a profession and the fact of belonging to a professional category do not necessarily confer professional status. A professional has an ethical obligation to maintain and enhance professional standards of his occupation.

The basic characteristics of a true professional could be reduced to the following two: a high level of competence and adherence to high ethical standards.

Lately, the focus is put on the requirement of continuing education as a direct result of the fundamental needs of professional competence. There are beliefs that "performance" is a peculiar quality of "professionalism" based on the reasoning that a true professional is not only a competent spectator sitting on the sidelines. The real professional is a performer who lives high standards of performance.

Altruism is often treated as a special quality of professionalism, seen as a "generous concern for charity in the service of others". In order to define the code of professionalism it is useful to look altruism through the concept of independence, as a crucial element of professional ethics. The professionals must be free to advance their own professional judgments. But no freedom can be absolute. Professionals who did not act in an ethical and legal framework are at

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[5] Romanian Parliament, *Legea nr. 7 din 18 februarie 2004* (Law no. 7 from February 18 2004), republished, regarding Codul de conduită a funcționarilor publici (The Code of conduct for civil servants), *Monitorul Oficial*, 2007.

risk of exclusion. The ultimate goal of the profession is to maintain and improve the quality of services.

The Total Quality Management - TQM

The Total Quality Management is a way of running an organization focused on quality, based on the participation of all its members and aiming at long-term success by satisfying the beneficiary, also at benefits for every member of the organization and for the society.

TQM is based on the following principles[6]:

- is focused on quality;
- is based on the participation of all members;
- aims at long-term success by meeting the beneficiaries;
- intents benefits for everyone in the organization and society.

Most authors agree that TQM is, above all, a new philosophy, a new model of enterprise culture and is intended to direct all activities and processes towards its beneficiary and optimize them, so as to bring long term benefits.

It is considered that the success of this management system is conditioned by the strong and constant involvement of top-management and by training and permanent education of all personnel in the enterprise.

The quality in the public sector

The public sector has to cope with numerous challenges and has to respond to many new needs and demands in society.[7] Due to these challenges and pressure, the public sector is an object of large reforms.[8]

Over the last two decades there appears to have been a huge amount of public management reform. Although there was also reform in earlier periods, the changes since 1980 have – in many countries – been distinguished by an international character and a degree of political salience which marks them out

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[6] Ministerul Administrației și Internelor (Ministry of Administration and Interior), *Ghidul pentru implementarea Cadrului de Auto-evaluare a Modului de Funcționare a Instituțiilor Publice* (CAF), 2006.

[7] OECD, *Public Management Developments*, Survey 1993, Paris, OECD, p. 196; OECD *Governance in transition. Public management reforms in OECD countries*, OECD, Paris, 1995; OECD, *Government of the Future*, Puma, Paris, 2000, p. 236.

[8] J. Lane, *New public management*, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 242; W. Kickert (ed.), *Public management and administrative reform in Western Europe*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 1997; D. Kettl, *The global public management revolution: a report on the transformation of governance*, The Brookings Institution, Washington DC, 2000.

from the more parochial or technical changes of the proceeding quarter century.[9]

The administrations of the EU Member Countries are not a homogeneous set of organizations, nor are their reform processes. Their reform processes are in fact quite divergent. The European scenery is a macedoine of systems. There is no agreed European model. Indeed, different EU countries have responded to the challenges in different ways.

Romania is making efforts to align with the new trends in public management, even from the EU pre-accession period. Concern for public administration reform is constant, even if the results are relatively few. *"Modernization of the public administration remains a priority, to which subsumes a number of reforms. The current context must be used as an opportunity to accelerate the modernization of public institutions."*[10] One of the objectives of the current administration reform is to increase quality and access to public services.[11]

Nevertheless these reforms are characterized by the introduction of new principles and common grounds: a growing focus on efficiency and effectiveness, attention to transparency and accountability, awareness of public service delivery and the role and place of the citizen/customer.[12] Many countries have recently undertaken initiatives placing the citizen/customer at the centre.

Christopher Pollitt and Geert Bouckaert described this tendency as a shift from a producer point of view to a citizen/customer point of view.[13] The dynamic way of getting citizens/customers of public services involved in order to enhance their perceptions, expectations and commitment through active participation, has been a common strategy to obtain a legitimate level of quality and satisfaction of public services.[14]

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[9] W. van Dooren, N. Thijs and G. Bouckaert, "Quality management and management of quality in the European public administrations," in E. Löffler and M. Vintar (eds.), *Improving the quality of East and West European public services,* Ashgate, UK, Hampshire, 2004, pp. 91-106.

[10] Guvernul României, *Programul de Guvernare 2009-2012* (Romanian Government Program 2009-2012), Preambul, 2009.

[11] Guvernul României, *Programul de Guvernare 2009-2012* (Romanian Government Program 2009-2012), Cap. 19 - Reforma administrației publice, 2009.

[12] L. Doherty and T. Horne, *Managing public services*, Routledge, London, 2002, p. 559; D. Shand, "Service quality in the public sector: the international experience", in C. Clark and D. Corbett (eds.), *Reforming the public sector*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1999, pp. 151-164; A. Schick, "Opportunity, Strategy and Tactics in Reforming Public Management," in OECD, *Government of the Future*, 2000, pp. 123-148.

[13] C. Pollitt and G. Bouckaert (eds.), *Quality Improvement in European Public Services, Concepts, Cases and Commentary*, Sage, London, 1995.

[14] OECD, "Engaging Citizens in Policy-making: information, consultation and public participation," *PUMA Policy Brief,* No.10, July 2001, p. 6.

The main issues which led to increased application of the concept of quality in the public sector can be summarized as follows:

• The increased education and the expanding opportunities for access to information have led to increasing citizens' skills in the interpretation and application of existing arrangements, mechanisms kept strictly under control in the public sector.

• Public service providers can not satisfy every desire or need of citizens. If the number of privately managed services is continuously increasing compared with the same kind of services administered by the state, it was found that the inefficiency and indifference in public institutions is inversely proportional.

According to the practice in the domain, in order to assess the quality of the services, customers use five criteria:

1. reliability – the ability to properly perform the services as they have been promised;
2. responsiveness – willingness to help customers and provide prompt service;
3. trust – afforded by the knowledge and courtesy of the employees, and also their ability to inspire customer confidence and confidentiality;
4. empathy – the individual attention which the organization manifests to its clients.

The foundation of quality in the public sector must be the professionalism and the morality of the public servants. Quality management in this sector must be oriented towards their improvement and consolidation, and this requires values, attitudes, guidelines and a culture of service in this sector focused on quality.

The convergence of quality and ethical standards

At the international level, the convergence of quality and ethical standards, of quality assurance management (QA) and ethics management (EM) comes into view. Already in some countries and in some traditional areas of pioneering (like medical ethics) people are not talking about quality standards, but of quality and ethics standards.

QA set of problems developed separately from EM, both conceptually and methodologically and institutionally.

Quality standards detail such institutional values as the effectiveness (the fulfillment of goals according to the strategic plan and at even lower costs), optimality (error prevention and mitigation), acceptability (respecting the wishes and needs of beneficiaries), legitimacy (compliance with laws and regulations,

including moral). From some points of view, the introduction of QA was justified as a preoccupation of the public administration towards the needs of the citizens-beneficiaries, as an evidence of institutional responsibility, essentially a moral issue.[15]

Ethics management (EM) is an even more recent branch of management that deals with all aspects of institutional control concerning the moral behavior of members of an organization, aiming to create integer organizations and to reduce risks of unethical behavior. The values defended by the ethical principles are: respect for individual autonomy, respect for dignity, respect, encouraging doing the good and discouraging doing the bad in the relations with one's neighbors, justice, integrity, responsibility, respecting the human rights, etc. The last decades have strongly urged into the public consciousness the importance of taking into consideration the ethical dimension of the life of organizations. Ultimately, it is desirable an integer public administration that respects its beneficiaries and its own staff, therefore puts value on quality. A strong ethical climate is associated with values such are efficiency, quality, excellence and teamwork.[16]

Regarding the civil service, the link between the ethical standards and the quality of services provided by the administration is evident right from the objectives' and principles' level. We recall that the main objective of the Romanian Code of conduct for civil servants is to increase the quality of public service. The principle of professionalism (according to which civil servants are required to perform job duties with responsibility, competence, efficiency, honesty and conscientiousness)[17] serves to accomplish the functions – and, ultimately, the service provided to citizens and society at high quality standards.

Next, arguments will be presented regarding the influence of Total Quality Management (TQM) on public service ethics.

Total Quality Management, support for ethical behavior

Total Quality Management "TQM" – as a philosophy of management practices, focuses on the dependency of the organization on the people it works with, on those who ensure its reputation based on quality. This approach facilitates

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[15] Liviu Andreescu, "Recenzia volumului Trends in Quality Assurance: A Selection Papers from the Third European Quality Assurance Forum," Bruxelles, European University Association, 2009, 80 p., published in *Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education*, vol. 1, No. 1, 2009.

[16] Donald Menzel, *Ethics Management for Public Administrators: Building Organizations of Integrity*, M.E. Sharpe, 2007.

[17] Romanian Parliament, *Legea nr. 7 din 18 februarie 2004* (Law no. 7 from February 18 2004), republished, regarding Codul de conduită a funcționarilor publici (The Code of conduct for civil servants), *Monitorul Oficial*, 2007.

the development of ethical behavior in relation with the human resources, partners, beneficiaries, and, last but not least, the society as a whole.

A convincing illustration of the above statement is offered by one of the most used tools of TQM in public management, the so-called Common Assessment Framework (CAF), a tool used to assess the functioning of public institutions. CAF originated from a joint analysis conducted by the European Foundation for Quality Management, the Speyer Institute and the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA), based on a selection of guiding principles.[18]

CAF is a questionnaire that allows the diagnosis of the functioning of public institutions, using Total Quality Management principles. CAF identifies favorable and unfavorable aspects of the institution assessed, representing the starting point in achieving a diagnosis. It provides a framework easy to approach and use, free, and that also allows the dissemination of good practice.

It is interesting to note that the CAF tool facilitates in a good measure the evaluation of the ethical behavior in the institutions or public authorities that use it. This is demonstrated by a selection of questions from the CAF questionnaire, shown below:[19]

- *What is the management doing to give the institution guidance, to develop and communicate a perspective, clear missions and values?* Does it establish a framework of values and a code of conduct? Does it include all stakeholders (e.g. the management team, employees, beneficiaries, other public services, elected representatives and suppliers) in the development of the mission, values, guidelines? Does it communicate and adapt the missions, values and guidelines to the changes in the external environment?

- *What is the management doing to motivate and mobilize the personnel, to stimulate their involvement, acting as an example for others?* Does it act as a model? Does it act in accordance with the values and objectives of the institution? Does it encourage trust and mutual respect? Does it recognize and reward the individual and collective efforts?

- *What is the institution doing to gather information on current and future needs of the stakeholders involved in its processes?* Does it consistently collect information on needs and expectations of the parties involved arranging investigations appropriate to the beneficiaries, partners, civil society and political

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[18] Ministerul Administrației și Internelor (Ministry of Administration and Interior), *Ghidul pentru implementarea Cadrului de Auto-evaluare a Modului de Funcționare a Instituțiilor Publice* (CAF), 2006.

[19] *Ibidem.*

representatives? Does it systematically assess the quality of information and how they are collected?

- *What is the institution doing for the development, monitoring and updating the strategy and action plan?* Does it systematically analyze the internal strengths and weaknesses? Does it analyze the risks and opportunities? Does it develop operational objectives based on the mission, values and strategic guidelines of the institution?

- *What is the institution doing for planning, managing and improving human resources taking into account the strategy and planning?* Does it develop, through consultation, a clear policy presenting objective criteria for recruitment, motivation, promotion, appointment to managerial positions and reward for the personnel? Does it ensure good working conditions in the institution? Does it manage the recruitment and career development taking account of equity in access to jobs and equal opportunities (gender, disability, race, ethnicity and religion)?

- *What is the institution doing to identify, develop and use the skills of its staff ensuring the consistency of objectives and goals of individuals, teams and the structure taken as a whole?* Does it develop and communicate a training plan based on current and future needs of the staff and the institution? Does it support and assist new employees? Does it respond to the needs of people with disabilities in terms of equipment and working conditions? Does it take into account the balance between the professional and private lives of employees?

- *What is the institution doing to involve its staff developing dialogue, accountability and autonomy?* Does it promote the establishment of non-authoritarian hierarchical relations and a climate of openness, communication and dialogue? Does it inform and make employees responsible about the objectives and results?

- *What measures are in place to ensure that the institution develop and implement partnerships with beneficiaries (customers/citizens) and/or with partners (internal/external)?* Does it encourage the citizens' involvement in debates on issues of general interest? Does it ensure the transparency of the institution, of its decisions and development in relation to its users?

- *What measures are in place to ensure that the institution is managing knowledge?* Does it ensure access for all staff to information relevant to their tasks and objectives? Does it provide access to all stakeholders and beneficiaries to any relevant information? Does it ensure the accuracy, reliability and security of information?

- *What measures are in place to ensure that the institution manages financial resources?* Does it provide budgetary and financial transparency? Does it analyze risks and opportunities of financial decisions? Does it promote transparency of managerial control?

- *What measures are in place to ensure that the institution is managing the buildings, locations, equipment and materials?* Does it ensure physical access to buildings adequate to the needs and expectations of employees and beneficiaries (e.g. access to parking and public transportation)?

- *What are the ways in which the institution develops and provides services involving the beneficiaries?* Does it involve the beneficiaries and other stakeholders in developing quality standards for services, products and information? Does it provide appropriate and accurate information, also assistance and support to beneficiaries? Does it ensure accessibility of services and information? Does it develop personalized services and create systems and procedures of solving complaints?

- *What is the impact of the institution on society?* The promotion of ethical values by the organization. The involvement in the community to which the institution belongs by means of assistance. Assistance for the disadvantaged. Awareness by the staff of the institution's impact on the quality of life of citizens.

- *What is the impact of the institution on society in terms of environment?* Integration of the sustainable development principles in the decision-making process (energy saving, use of reusable energy sources, total energy use, etc.). Efforts to reduce the harmful effects or damages caused by the institution's activities and provision of protection and safety to citizens.

This questionnaire does not explicitly address corruption issues, but offers a framework for revelation of the interpersonal relationships ethics, management ethics, of the responsibility to the institution, to society and to the environment. CAF constrains to the identification of courses of action to improve the activity, which can be used to plan the future performance, including ethics.

As the CAF assessment respects the principles of TQM, but also numerous ethical norms, it is clear that the performance in the continuous improvement of quality of service delivered to citizens leads directly to improved performance in public service ethics.

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