

# The Self-Assessment of Services' Quality in Public Administration

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## Abstract

*The paper is part of doctoral research which researches current trends in the quality management in public administration.*

*Increasing service quality and minimizing risks in public administration is the main goal of the quality-risk management in the present context in which Romanian public administration is constantly changing having as background its alignment to the new European standards.*

*The objectives of this research are the following: the analysis of public services quality as well as the way in which clients perceive these services. The paper studies the self-assessment process viewed as the main instrument in measuring the quality of public services, the author creating a model of the self-assessment cycle in public administration within this paper.*

**Key words:** quality management, quality, public administration, self-assessment

**J.E.L. classification:** G32, H83

## 1. Introduction

In the department of public services, quantifying the quality of rendered services is very difficult as it has few physical features that can be used for comparison or measurement. This constitutes the main reason for which we cannot evaluate or quantitatively measure the quality of services in public administration. Services quality can be measured by using the assessment from clients. The citizen is the main beneficiary of public services and their quality can be conveyed as the ratio between the consumer's expectations and the real performance of the rendered service. The management of public institutions pursues an increase in the quality of these services by exceeding the clients' expectations.

Seen from another perspective, the quality of public services can be analyzed according to the stages of the service, that is from the initial request to the actual performing of the service and even the post-performing period.

Figure no.1 The perception of the direct provider



Source: own processing

To conclude, it can be stated that, in accordance with the client's/consumer's demands, quality can be defined based on two main components: the quality of the actual service being performed for the client and the quality of the attendance service.

Objective quality refers to the physical support, the environment, the equipment and the qualified personnel.

Public institutions wish to attain exceptional quality standards and, to achieve this, they must present an offer suitable to all the needs of the target clients while offering very well-trained employees and excellent serving abilities so that the entire process following the performed service may run without problems. In other words, all the departments of a public institution should function as a coherent system. (Žurga, 2008).

## **2. Theoretical background**

The main method of measuring the quality of public services is SELF-ASSESSMENT. By using it, the level of performance offered by public institutions can be identified in connection to quality standards. Self-assessment aims for two main objectives: monitoring the progress of public institutions' management and its streamlining.

Self-assessment can be defined in many ways:

- the first stage toward achieving excellency, further development. It refers to growth, an enhancement of public administration functioning;
- a step toward progress;
- a real opportunity for future development;
- an integral part of activities meant to improve the quality of public administration.

It targets improvement activities planned by the professor.

Feedback coming from direct and indirect recipients of these services offers important information regarding the quality of the rendered service. Collecting this information from the recipients is done by using "self-assessment tools".

At the European level, self-assessment is the main tool used in the public sector and it is used within a common framework used by all public institutions. This self-assessment tool for public administration services refers to the techniques used by public servants to identify strengths and weaknesses generated by public institutions and propose solutions that have at their core the improvement of such activities. (Petrescu, 2008)

Considering the previous statements, we can deduct that self-assessment has the following advantages: it is a tool for management quality created and specifically used for public administration, it is very easy to use and implies minimal costs as it is done by the actual employees which generates a strong involvement of all the parties concerned; it leads to the analysis of the way in which the organization functions, starting from the performed services and the results that follow them.

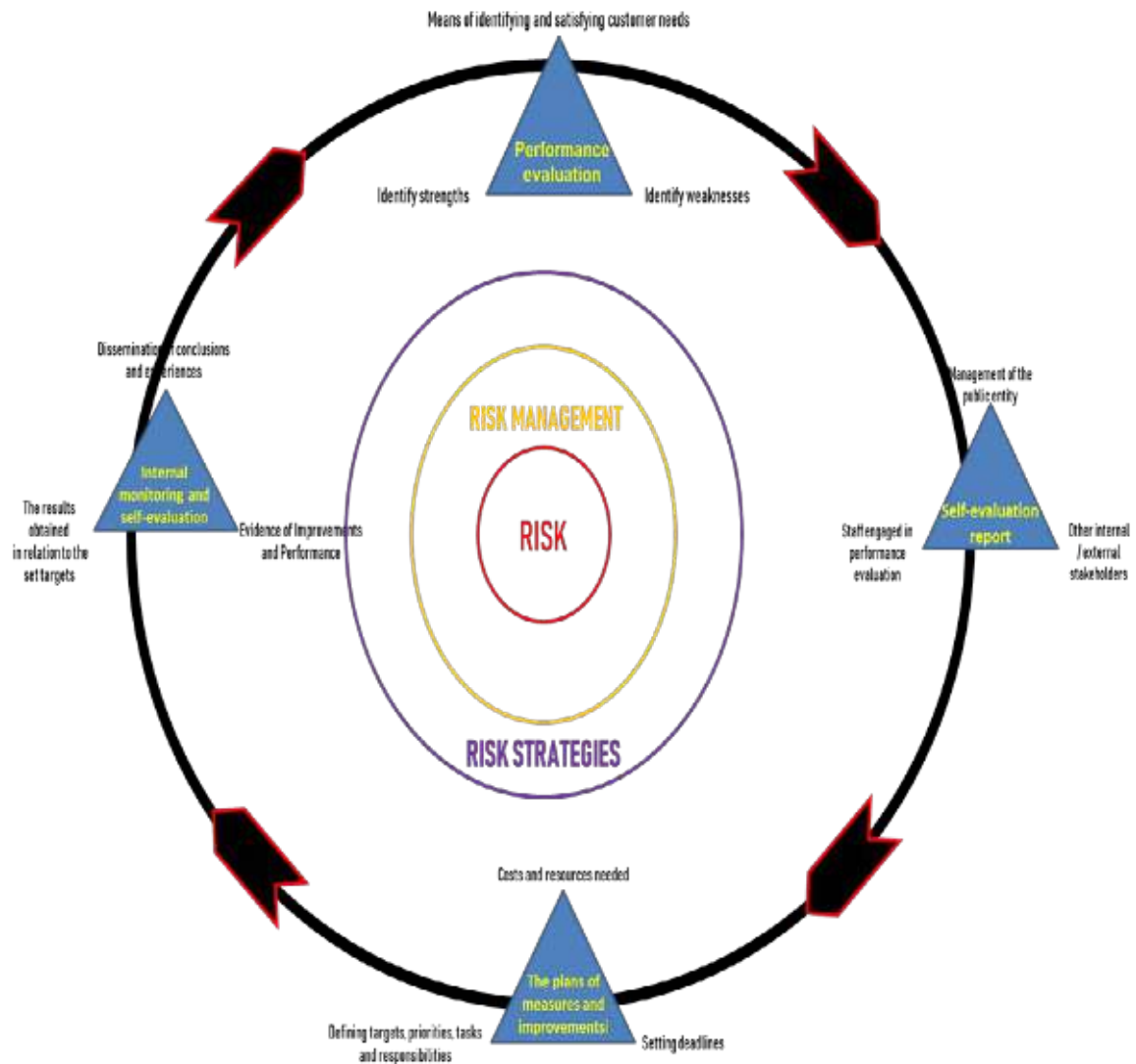
## **3. A model of the self-assessment cycle in public administration**

Being a relatively new instrument, self-assessment has an innovative potential that starts from within the organization, being at the same time a positive aspect as well as a challenge. Self-assessment must begin with an evaluation that has the purpose of identifying the improvement measures that are to be implemented. It also offers the possibility of external feedback.

Since ensuring the quality of public services means increasing the trust of the people in public administration in the sense of satisfying expectations and demands as well as the compatibility of the institution's quality management system with current European standards, we can state that these activities that target the achievement of quality cannot directly control it. At this stage, the organization's self-assessment comes in, being achieved in compliance with certain standards.

The first stage in the self-assessment process is that of measuring the obtained results. Stage two pursues identifying remedial and improvement measures that will be implemented in order to obtain an improvement in services quality. It has as its main goal improving quality permanently and constantly.

Figure no. 2 A model of the self-assessment cycle in public administration



Source: own processing

As shown in figure no. 2, the process of self-assessment and continued improvement has more stages: evaluating performance; the self-assessment report; the plans of measures and improvements which consider what needs to be improved and the action plans; internal monitoring and self-assessment-the stage that targets in what way the plans of measures have been implemented and the percentage of the achieved proposed aims.

The last stage is external assessment. The self-assessment cycle centers on the risks that will be analyzed in order to be diminished or eliminated followed by the risk management the institution's manager relies on during self-assessment. The risk strategies represent the overview vision the top managers in public institutions acquire by involving themselves in the self-assessment process.

Self-assessment has as its main objective improving one's own performance.

This process offers public institutions the possibility to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and, even to compare their performance to that of other suppliers of public services. It pursues the possibilities of improvement as well as setting objectives and organizing the actions required to increase performance based on their priority while supplying the means to identify and satisfy the clients' needs.

Self-assessment must be regarded as a means of continuous improvement even if it is not a goal in itself and has as its main target the elimination of weaknesses. It starts with planning the improvements wanted to be achieved. This planning pursues consolidating pre-existing strengths and identifying the weaknesses to be modified during evaluation. Planning and implementing

changes are very important processes that must be done thoroughly. Poor planning and implementation lead to failure in obtaining improvements. To avoid this, it is paramount that all interested parties be involved in the planning process. They will have clear responsibilities and clearly set deadlines.

During self-assessment, the main specific instrument is CAF (Common Assessment Framework). It is promoted by the European Institute for Public Administration and pursues achieving a common self-assessment framework in the entire European public administration system.

Although it was implemented as a pilot-program ever since 2000, it is still not implemented in all public institutions at the moment but is nonetheless an important step toward TQM –Total Quality Management.

In terms of total quality management in public administration, the CAF is the tool for mobilizing and promoting and raising awareness. In conclusion, the CAF not only evaluates, it sensitizes, meaning it tries to change outdated mentalities and make it easier to accept new working tools.

In Romania it is considered of great importance to stimulate the development of the quality management by the public entities, if we take into account the increased efficiency of the quality management when it uses as the main instrument the self-evaluation, creating a functioning framework correlated with the requirements and expectations of the citizens benefiting by public services.

#### 4. Conclusions

Self –assessment is the process that is used to answer the needs of all employees in public administration in order to efficiently fulfil all work-related tasks, the main goal being that of increasing quality and efficiency in performing current activities.

By using self-assessment, the management identifies internal and/or external problems and aims at diminishing or even removing the risks that cause these problems.

It can be concluded that a more active involvement of the top managers in public institutions increases the quality of services by attaining a unitary vision during experience exchanges while, at the same time, increasing the capacity to anticipate, prevent and diminish the risks that appear with public institutions.

It can be stated that during the self-assessment cycle all the personnel involved in it acquires knowledge that targets the principles of quality-risk management.

And last but not least, self-assessment offers benefits that regard the increase in quality of the offered services. The public entity will streamline its processes with the purpose of welcoming and satisfying the clients' needs, having as its background a dynamic society in perpetual change in what IT is concerned.

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