

Quality Management in Public Administration – Case of Slovenia

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Abstract—

In Slovene public administration, quality management is recognised as a mean for strengthening the administrative capacity for improving effectiveness and efficiency of the government and its apparatus. In this article we present how quality management in public administration is addressed in Slovenia. The methodology used is a case study, and in this framework we present and describe main strategic documents, projects and initiatives. Special emphasis is given to the Quality Committee that was driving the area at the Ministry in charge of public administration in the period from 1999 to 2012 and its projects and activities, and to the current public administration development strategy 2015 – 2020. As a conclusion, we present how further development in this area is being addressed through the development of the national business excellence strategy for the period 2018 – 2030 where public administration is not only an important part but a driving force as well.

Keywords— Quality, business excellence, quality management, public administration, Quality Committee, CAF, EFQM, quality conferences, strategy, Slovenia.

I. INTRODUCTION

Slovenia is a country that gained its independence in 1991. Since the very beginning of its functioning, clear political and developmental goals were set. In respect to managing quality, Slovenia adopted its national program as early as in 1993 that addressed not only private but also the public sector [1].

Activities in the area of quality in Slovene public administration were intensified in 1999, when in the Ministry of Interior, then responsible for public administration, the Quality Committee was established [2]. 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 and efficient functioning, and on the awareness of the role of the management. Additional impulse toward further development of quality of Slovene public administration was due to the formation of the Ministry of Public Administration in December of 2004. The Ministry of Public Administration has been incorporating the demands and quality performance standards of Slovene public administration into the legislation and in all the strategic documents, which it prepares and/or cooperates in preparing.

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 responsible also for achievement of results. Regardless of different level of quality of their performance, we can see that each one of them has accomplished a certain progress, primarily in the area of its mandate and in the execution of services within their jurisdiction. 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. Important contribution to the quality of performance represents also the Decree on administrative operations [3] which defines basic standards for provision of public services. Ways in which various public administration bodies approach their endeavor for the higher quality, vary: they may entail different sets of standards, and because of that, they result in a different level of mastering the quality of their services. In this strive for quality, the Ministry of Public Administration offers to the bodies and public administration organization its support, guidance and various methodological frameworks.

II. THE APPROACH TO MANAGING QUALITY IN SLOVENE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Activities in the area of quality and business excellence in Slovene public administration are characterized with the combination of 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches [4].

The 'top down' approach is being used in particular in the activities of the Ministry responsible for public administration and guidance 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, methodological tools and frameworks, as well as the institutionalization of good practices and quality standards into the legislation.

The 'bottom up' approach denotes activities in the introduction of systems that will bring quality into individual bodies/organizations of public administration. Foremost, it relates to the introduction of systems of quality management 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.

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 competences and processes of the organization. It supports total quality management for the improvement of such organization. Main characteristics and advantages of this strategy are: conformity of the organizational structure with its basic competences, adjustment of activities to the cultural norms of the organization, implementation of corrections and adjustment of deviations in regard to the accepted standards, and incessant search for opportunities to improve, be it within the organization or without.

III. QUALITY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES, PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES IN SLOVENE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

It is important to mention that 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 in charge for public administration. The main purpose of its activity was defined as an efficient, citizen friendly, recognizable and responsible public administration. Within this, the Quality Committee focused on following goals: to increase effectiveness and efficiency, to increase satisfaction of customers and employees, to control costs, to improve transparency of operations, to raise image and visibility, and to gain ISO quality certificate for administrative units [5]. In continuation we present main areas of quality management in Slovene public administration that substantially contributed to the quality of public services and to the quality of public administration organizations' operation.

A. Promotion of CAF and methodological support

In Slovenia, CAF – Common Assessment Framework is promoted and used as a quality management tool for stimulation of organisational, national and international learning and development. Systematic promotion and implementation of CAF in Slovene public administration began already in 2002, at first by translating CAF into Slovene language and establishing of support activities at the ministry responsible for public administration and after that, by positioning CAF into strategic documents and initiatives at the state level [6]. Several activities are conducted by the ministry in charge of public administration, i.e. spreading information on CAF, CAF publications, CAF webpage, and methodological support such as forms for self-assessment or providing information and measurements to support the 'Results' side of the CAF model. CAF remains strategic direction also for the future, and is included in the public administration development strategy 2015-2020.

B. Participation in the competition for the Business Excellence Prize of the Republic of Slovenia

In the year 2004 pilot project PRSPO for public administration was carried out with participation of the following Administrative Units: Grosuplje, Jesenice, Krško, Ljutomer, Maribor, Murska Sobota, Nova Gorica, Novo mesto, Slovenj Gradec, Slovenske Konjice, Šentjur pri Celju, Trebnje and Tržič, and Police Administration Maribor.

Pilot project PRSPO for public administration in year 2004 was a joint venture between the Metrology Institute of the Republic of Slovenia (MIRS) and Ministry of the Interior. The achieved results by the participating organizations of the public administration of 301 – 350 points were by the range of 50 points higher from those achieved in comparable pilot projects [7]. Considering the organizations that participated in the pilot project PRSPO for public administration, it can be concluded that the achieved results were not the result of coincidences, but in fact the result of focused and consistent actions in this area in the past years: all participating public administration organizations already implemented quality management systems, mostly in conformity with the ISO 9000 standards or CAF. Since 2005, public administration organizations participate in the PRSPO in the category of public sector [8].

C. Pilot project for assessing excellence in public administration based on CAF

This pilot project was conducted in 2007. It was financed by the Ministry of Public Administration, and implemented by the Faculty for Public Administration, in cooperation with the MIRS. The purpose of the project was to develop and establish a system of external assessment of quality in organizations of Slovene public administration, based on the CAF model and the Decree on administrative operations with respect to standards of operation with clients by public administration organizations [9].

As participatory organizations, the following public administration organizations took part in the pilot project: the Environmental Agency, Centre for Social Work Ljutomer, Police Administration Novo mesto, Market Inspectorate, Office of the Ombudsman, Administrative Unit Metlika, Administrative Unit Velenje and the Employment Service of the Republic of Slovenia – Regional Office Koper.

The project was not important only for the external verification of organization's results, but for the stimulation of learning and transfer of good practices as well. Alongside of the development of the assessment system, there is a development of a network of trained assessors who will use the knowledge and experiences acquired in this project, in their own organization as well as disseminate them into other environments.

As it was decided at the Ministry of public administration not to establish a system of recognition in Slovenia based on CAF and parallel to EFQM recognition schemes but to take part in the development of the CAF External Feedback, the results of the pilot project were used as an important input into this further development of CAF, the CAF External Feedback module [10]. Slovenia was actively involved in its development and gave a presentation on the event where the CAF External Feedback module was officially launched [11].

D. Networking of CAF users

Alongside the promotion and usage of CAF networking of Slovene public administration into various, usually regionally initiated networks for transfer of knowledge and experiences were established, 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, 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, in the case of Slovenia practical usage usually among the administrative units. This type of learning among the Slovene administrative units is widespread, because in addition to the identification of area of improvement, it also encourages the exchange of experiences among the colleagues (peer review) and the 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 because of their own interest and needs. Example: comparative survey of some performance indicators due to cooperation in the PRSPO 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.

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 as one of its central values. In this context, the Common Assessment Framework is an important quality tool as it meets needs at national as well as at organizational levels. At the national level CAF supports implementation of the TQM principles as well as the incremental method and philosophy of continuous improvements of the functioning and of the services. At the organizational level CAF supports the management of these organizations, basically due to following reasons: it offers an organizational model for managing the organization; enables organizational diagnostics and then focusing on improvement actions in the range that suits the management in the circumstances given (duration, resources available); enables monitoring and demonstrating the improvements; motivates employees, and last but not least, CAF builds the bridge towards more advanced and demanding quality management tools and approaches [12].

E. Quality conferences and sharing of good practices

Sharing of good practices has been stimulated in Slovenian public administration since early 2000's, initiated through activities of the Quality Committee [13]. Ministry in charge for public administration organized ten annual conferences on quality in Slovene public administration, between years 2001 and 2010. At eight conferences, in the period 2002 – 2009 good practice examples were chosen on the bases of public call and upon selection criteria defined. 25 of them were awarded the 'Good Practice' prize. All of them were presented at the conferences and published in conference proceedings [14]. Besides the awarded good practice cases some other interesting good practice examples were published, too.

Conference proceedings of all ten annual quality conferences in Slovene public administration (since 2006 also in English language) are available at the website of the Ministry of public administration [15].

It is important to mention that since 2005, the quality conferences were gradually internationalized – through cooperation of distinguished speakers from international arena and participants from abroad. Thus, the 2009 conference hosted participants from seven foreign countries: Greece, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Latvia, Poland and Russia. All together about 2,000 participants from Slovenia and the world attended the conferences, around 110 speakers and lecturers co-operated.

All the facts stated above are only directly measured results – numerous are also implications of these activities in Slovenia and in the European Union as we are actively participating to the further quality development at that level, as well.

It is worth to expose the added value of the quality conferences proceedings – it is not only in spreading of good practices in Slovenia, but in dissemination of national good practice examples in the European Union and even wider. Purpose of starting issuing bilingual conference proceedings in the year 2006 was to support Slovenian Presidency to the Council of the EU in 2008 and to expand knowledge of examples of good functioning in Slovenian administration externally as well as to support vision of the Ministry of Public Administration set in that time: to have public administration among the best in the European Union [16].

The idea of sharing good practice cases in Slovene public administration was embraced in some sectors, such as police [17], judiciary and others. Despite the fact that tradition of annual quality conferences was interrupted, ministry in charge of public administration continues with transfer and sharing of good practices in form of different events, and publishes the information in this respect at the ministry's web page (as previously indicated).

IV. PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

In April 2015, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted the Public Administration Development Strategy 2015–2020.

The vision of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia as stated in the strategy [18], »is to organise modern public administration which will observe the principles and values of: law and the rule of law; professionalism; participation; transparency, integrity and corruption prevention; responsiveness and user-orientation; consensus-orientation and integration; fairness and integration; innovation, success and efficient use of resources; responsibility, as the basis for measures and indicators of effectiveness, observation of public interest, satisfaction of citizens, companies and other stakeholders with which it will achieve above-average results among EU Member States regarding high-quality service provision«.

Key strategic goals are defined as:

- »responsive, effective and efficient operation of user-oriented public administration;
- efficient use of human, financial, spatial, environmental and energy resources;
- responsible, open and transparent operation of public administration;
- zero tolerance to corruption and enhancement of integrity;
- professionalism and development of professional competence and employee innovation;
- the system of flexible management of employees using mechanisms of responsibility, and the upgrading of the salary system with motivation mechanisms;
- the modernisation of administrative procedural law and the inspection system;
- improving quality systems, programme planning, operation review, measurable objectives and process indicators;
- improving legislation, reducing legislative burdens, assessing impacts, and including key stakeholders;
- efficient informatics, increased use of e-services, digitalisation and interoperability of information solutions.«

In respect to the objective of introducing a comprehensive quality management system in public administration, the three sub-objectives are defined as:

1. Strengthening support and awareness of employees about the importance of quality as a value in public administration;
2. Strengthening the quality management system development based on the CAF model and exchange of good practices at all public administration levels:
 - Setting legal bases for establishing quality management system and performance assessments of public administration organisations at a system level, based on the CAF model;
 - Regular internal audits / self-assessments of quality management system (CAF) in public administration at all levels and improved review on quality management system implementation in state administration;
 - External audits of quality management system with improvements action plan – pilot implementation in 5 administrative bodies with 25 external assessors;
 - Knowledge spreading and promotion, through quality conferences, quality control, performance review and responsibility in respect to resources;
3. Strengthening the quality management system through implementation of application for measuring key goals and performance indicators.

In July 2015, two-year action plan for the implementation of the 2015-2020 public administration development strategy [19] for the period 2015-2016 was adopted, and in 2016 the next action plan for the period 2016-2017 [20] followed. In each two-year action plan for the implementation of the 2015-2020 public administration development strategy, the time frame and indicators are set for individual areas till the end of the biannual period.

V. CONCLUSIONS WITH INDICATIONS OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Public administrations in practically all countries face challenges in respect to efficiency and quality of their services. In their endeavours for better performance, they progressively implement general public management principles and quality management, as well. Countries exercise different approaches however having a common aim: to build institutional and administrative capacity to adequately support their political management and national economies. It is evident from the case presented that it is at most recommended to have national development documents and strategic goals set, to support efforts in this regard and to enable also the synergy that may only be derived from agreed goals and directions.

In Slovenia, business excellence strategy is being developed, for the period 2018 – 2023. Its preparation began in 2016. The whole process is being led by the Metrology Institute of the Republic of Slovenia (MIRS) which is a body within the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology and is in charge for the Slovenian business excellence prize. MIRS is also national EFQM representative in Slovenia [21].

Numerous stakeholders from private and public sector, academia and professional organizations were involved in preparation of the draft strategic document. Proposal of the Slovenian national business excellence strategy was launched into public consideration in July 2017 [22]; comments and additional proposals are to be gathered till September, the 1st. The whole process of strategy preparation and adoption is planned to be concluded in 2017. The four strategic goals proposed are: institutionalization of business excellence, establishing and upgrading business excellence recognition schemes, developing business excellence in the society in a systematic way and, having public sector as an example of excellence. For all four strategic goals action plans are proposed, both for private and for public sector and indicating main approaches and/or activity areas, with timeframe and main indicators. The purpose of the strategic document is to contribute to the competitiveness of national economy and the wellbeing of Slovenian citizens.

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