HOW CAN ONE CREATE AN EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF
QUALITY CULTURE IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: *The paper addresses the quality approach in public administration from a cultural perspective and presents: theoretical considerations on the "quality culture (QC)"; a review of the publications on cultural aspects in administrative institutions; the management process of QC in public institutions and the conclusion. As the publications' review shows, the management of the QC must be a task of the top management in any administrative institution, in order to identify the factors that impede the effective functioning of quality system and to make improvements. The paper aims to support decision-makers in this regard, by presenting solutions for a systematic and effective management of QC.*

Key words: *organizational culture, quality culture, quality culture in public administration, evaluation of quality culture; management of quality culture*

1. Introduction

The focus on quality is one of the main axes of change in the "public administration (PA)", in the context of the transformations generically called the "New Public Management (NPM)" and "New Public Governance (NPG)" (Lapuente and Van de Walle, 2020; Popescu, Mandru and Deas, 2021). The actions are materialized in specific laws, strategies, structures and tools addressing quality in governance and PA and are found at all levels of governance and also in public organizations. As a previous work by the authors states, the systematic approach to quality at national scale aims at achieving quality of governance, a complex concept that includes the quality of public services. But ensuring the quality of public services ultimately depends on the institutions that provide them, the implementation of "quality management systems (QMSs)" in public institutions being the solution currently used worldwide in this regard (Popescu and Mandru, 2022).

The present paper addresses the quality in PA and governance from a cultural perspective. This approach is justified considering the major influence of "organizational culture (OC)" on the effectiveness of the quality system in governance and public institutions. The concept of "quality culture (QC)" is used in this context.

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The specific objectives of the paper are: 1) to clarify the meaning given to the QC; 2) to review the publications focused on the OC, and respectively QC in administrative institutions; 3) to define the QC management process and the ways of action to make it work effectively in all public organizations. The final conclusion highlights the novelty elements of the paper and the topic of further research to support the implementation of QC management in public institutions at the national level.

The paper's methodology consists of the analysis based on publications, as well as the process approach to QC management in administrative institutions.

The results of the study are useful for the decision-makers from government structures in the development of mechanisms and tools for the effective management of QC in PA and governance.

2. Organizational Culture and Quality Culture, Conceptual Clarification

The concept of OC does not have a single definition. According to Hofstede (1991, p.5), the OC is "the collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another". As stated by Popescu, Mandru and Gogoncea (2017, p.121), OC is a complex concept that synthesizes the totality of values, ways of thinking, conceptions, written and especially unwritten rules of an organization that differentiates it from others and reflects the way to interact with customers, partners, competitors, and especially with its employees. Simply defined, the OC represents the "lifestyle of an organization", and is found expressed mainly in the behavioral patterns of employees (Dauber, Fink and Yolles, 2012).

The focus on OC emerged in the 1980s, in the context of increasing international competition, the corporate culture being presented as an asset that could be managed to improve business performance (Schein, 1990). As many publications state, the failure to implement modern management systems or other change projects occurred, in most cases, because the organization's culture was not aligned with the new values, principles, and methods (Cameron and Quinn, 2006, pp.7-16; O'Donnell & Boyle, 2008). When the assumed values and employees' behaviors remain constant, the changes are often formal, even if the structures and working procedures have changed.

The OC matters enormously in the implementation of quality management. According to Kujala and Lillrank (2004), the quality management can be studied as a cultural phenomenon. The analysis regarding the factors on which the success in the modern quality approach depends on, stress the need to develop an OC in which quality is seen as everyone's responsibility and as a goal that employees at all levels try to achieve in their daily activity (Roldan, Leal-Rodríguez and Leal, 2012; Popescu, Mandru and Gogoncea 2017, pp. 121-122). Such a culture was labeled as QC (Jancikova and Brychta, 2009).

QC is an increasingly widespread topic of study in recent years, in the context of organizations focusing on quality management. In these publications many definitions of QC are presented, ranging from a simple formulation, such as "an established culture aimed at quality enhancement in an organization" (IGI Global, 2023), to more complex descriptions that include various parameters of the QC. For example, according to

Forbes (2014, p.36) the QC includes, but is not limited to: leadership; a compelling vision; company wide shared values; active and ongoing engagement with customers to continually identify and address current and evolving needs; staff empowerment; performance metrics; and appropriate incentives for all individuals. Many papers refer to the determinants of QC, but there is no single variant (e.g.: Malhi, 2013; Campos et al, 2014; Dellana and Hauser, 2015; Kottmann et al 2016; Kairisa and Lapina, 2019). Reference elements in this regard are the basic principles of quality management defined in the ISO 9000 (2015) series of standards for QMSs, namely: customer focus; leadership; engagement of people; process approach; improvement; evidence-based decision making; relationship management.

It should be stressed that the conceptual definition itself is not a goal, but a premise for diagnosing and improving QC. The publications present different tools for assessing QC, applied in various domains, e.g.: Higher Education (HE) (Lapina, Kairisa and Aramina, 2015; Kottmann et al, 2016; Tutko, 2018; Sattler and Sonntag, 2018), health (Mannion, Konteh and Davies, 2009; Mannion and Davies, 2018), and other economic sectors (Teravainen, Junnonen and Ali-Loytty, 2018; Araujo et al, 2019; Diogenes et al, 2019).

One of the evaluation tools widely used in all domains is the "Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI)", proposed by Cameron and Quinn (2006, 2011). The OCAI produces an overall OC profile based on the next six dimensions: dominant characteristics; organizational leadership; management of employees; organization glue; strategic emphases; criteria of success. In addition, the Competing Values Framework was elaborated by the same authors, a model used to define the OC type. The model differentiates the following four types of culture: clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy. As the authors state, the OCAI is an instrument that allows to diagnose the dominant orientation of one organization based on these core culture types.

In accordance with the paper's objectives, the following section presents an overview of studies on the approach to OC in PA, with a focus on the QC assessment.

3. Review of Publications on Organizational Culture and Quality Culture in Administrative Institutions

The studies on OC, and respectively QC in PA, are diverse, considering the typology of services to which they refer, namely: education, health, defence, public transportation, town halls, etc. Given the paper's goals, the following review focuses only on publications that address OC and QC in administrative institutions, such as ministerial structures, agencies, prefectures and mayors.

The initial intention was to review the publications on QC in administrative institutions, but their number being small, the research expanded to include the OC. An additional argument for this extension is that, in general, the defining elements of QC are found in the new cultural models of PA, associated to the NPM and NPG. In this regard, Vinni (2007) remarks that customer/ citizen orientation, democratization/ increased managerial freedom in resource management, performance measurement, investment in human resource, openness to innovation, etc. are common components of the NPM paradigm and quality management.

The first publications analyzed below refer to OC in PA, whose transformation is a key issue in the context of public service reform.

Kregel, Straetenand and Coners (2018) have made a review of the publications on the OC in PA appeared in the 1994-2015 period. Analyzing the aspired OC of the NPM movement, the authors remark that "a detailed definition of NPM culture cannot be found", and propose a model of the NPM culture framework defined in terms of input, process, and output. The input includes entrepreneurship, external customer, and participation. As processes, the next four are considered: commitment, continuous improvement, innovation, and internal customer focus on the process of service delivery. The output includes the values of accountability and goal orientation. Theoretical considerations and a literature-based analysis on the values appropriate to OC in the public domain are also made by O'Riordan (2015), which stresses that conducting specific cultural surveys by the organization' leaders should be considered.

The OC evaluation is the subject of several applicative studies, e.g.: Alom (2020) analyses the frontline public bureaucrats practice in Bangladesh, based on a questionnaire with items associated to four cultural dimensions (power distance, uncertainty avoidance, participation, and team orientation); Rukh and Qadeer (2018) make a diagnosis of the culture in public organizations in Pakistan based on the Competing Values Framework (the model developed by Cameron and Quinn, 2011); the same model is used by Massaras, Sahinidis and Polychronopoulos (2014) in the quantitative research based on questionnaire carried out in the administrative offices of the City of Zografou (Greece). All these papers highlight the need for PA management to become familiar with the methods of evaluating and transforming OC. Several publications present concrete achievements in this regard from various countries. For instance, O'Donnell and Boyle (2008) refer in their paper to the management of cultural change in different area of public sector from Australia, Canada, and UK. A distinct chapter is dedicated to practices of managing culture in relation to the implementation of reform across the public service in Ireland. Overall, the examples are focused on the process of changing the culture, underlying the importance of leadership, strategy, team-working, training on cultural awareness backed up by the job experience.

One of the first national regulations regarding the OC of public institutions is the guide elaborated in Australia, by the Victorian Public Service Commission (VPSC), a "State Service Authority (SSA)" designed "to foster the development of an efficient, integrated and responsive public sector which is highly ethical, accountable and professional in the ways it delivers services to the community" (SSA, 2013, p.2). The guide sets the framework for applying the modern values, principles and standards in PA organizations. It is stressed the need for permanently assessing the OC, in order to identify the factors that impede the real application of new principles and to intervene operatively. Some empirical approaches that provide a starting point in this regard are presented, namely: employee opinion surveys, 360-degree feedback, turnover data, and employee's exit interview results. Starting from 2016, an independent opinion survey conducted by the VPSC was annually performed. The survey enables employees from organizations across the public sector, and evaluates the employees' view on different aspects of their organizations, including management and leadership, service delivery, employee

engagement, public sector values, etc. As the authors state, the survey results help organizations to build a positive culture based on the new values in public sector (VPSC, 2023).

The next review presents relevant publications on QC in PA.

In her work, Tomescu (2013) stresses the connection between the QC and PA reform. The author analyzes the QC in public institutions from the perspective of the "Code of Conduct for Public Servants" in Romania and concludes that the legal principles are inextricably linked with the QC and their integral fulfillment supposes a strong QC in any authority and public institution.

Several papers present case studies on the relationship between QC and the QMSs performance. Rexhepi and Qosja (2012) examine in their work the impact of organizational culture on the functioning of QMSs based on ISO 9001 through an empirical study performed in three public institutions in Kosovo. The interview-based analysis focused on the following elements: staff involvement in change, informality/ un-documented activities, professional training, role perception, motivation, incentives, professional ethics, responsibility and accountability to society/ public, institutional tradition and culture of work. A more complex research was realized by Porcher (2019), which addresses the QC in PA at the macro level, using a cross-country data set to empirically investigate the relationship between national culture and the quality of governance.

Finally, some EU tools focused on QC in PA are presented. The EU Toolbox for quality in PA (2017) refers in a separate chapter to the need to stimulate QC in PA organizations and provides inspiring examples of how governments in various EU member states support public organizations to have adherence to the principles of quality management. Practical actions in this regard are carried out by European Public Sector Award (EPSA), a platform for public excellence which supports the implementation of "The Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at Local Level (2008, the first edition), including 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance (Council of Europe, 2008). The EPSA actions and projects focused on these principles have proven to be effective tools for real and sustainable change of the OC in PA, contributing implicitly to the development of QC.

Concluding the literature review, it can be observed the small number of publications focused on the cultural aspects in administrative institutions. The approaches are different in term of objectives and models used: there are theoretical and applicative studies related to OC, and respectively QC. Some of the publications focus on defining QC, others on evaluating or transforming culture. Generally, the case studies related to cultural transformations are based on descriptive analyses, and the culture evaluation ones consist in empirical research based on questionnaires, carried out in one or more public institutions. The literature review shows the diversity of models and survey tools proposed by the papers' authors, this being an impediment in the implementation by institutions of such a process. In addition, regardless of the tool, carrying out processes of evaluation and transformation of the OC within some isolated, not repetitive research programs is not enough. A major problem is the development of these processes so that they are carried out systematically and effectively in all public institutions. Some

suggestions in this regard and also the determinants that must be considered within the QC survey are presented in the next section of the paper.

4. Management Process of Quality Culture in Administrative Institutions

As the previous review shows, there is a consensus regarding the need to address QC in PA in a systematic manner. The systematic approach means first of all that the actions do not have to be occasional, but repeated. It also means that there must be adequate tools and indicators to measure the QC and track progress. All these requirements are summarized in the definition of QC management as a process.

The process based approach is one of the basic principles of quality management (ISO 9000, 2015). The implementation of this principle supposes that the processes on which the quality in the organization depends on, have to be planned, controlled and continuously improved. In quality management this cycle is known as the PDCA mechanism (abbreviation from Plan-Do-Check-Act). A process is defined by the next elements: coordinator, purpose, inputs, activities (with methods and resources), outputs, and performance indicators (Popescu, Mandru and Gogoncea, 2017, pp.41-50).

Figure 1 presents schematically the main elements of the process of QC management: inputs, activities and outputs. The activities reveal the classic cycle of any managerial process, with sequences corresponding to the mechanism of continuous improvement (the PDCA cycle). The development of activities is not done at random, they must be regulated by procedures, action programs and other documents that describe what and how they are done. The process coordinator must be the leader at the highest level, who is responsible for developing the QC in organization.
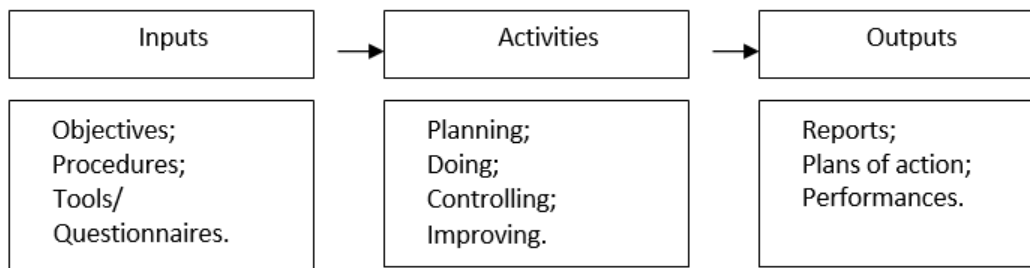

Fig. 1. *The Process of 'Quality Culture' Management*

The central stage of the QC management process is the evaluation survey, which requires appropriate tools. As the previous literature review shows, several models have been used in case studies on OC, and respectively QC. Two of these models are more known: the OCAI, the most used tool in assessments of organizational culture in all domains; the second refers to the QC and focuses on principles of quality management defined by ISO 9000 standards (2015). In the opinion of the paper's authors, the alignment to ISO 9000 is important considering the wide application of this referential within public institutions (Popescu and Mandru, 2022). Table 1 shows the determinants of these two models and, in addition, the model for the evaluation of QC proposed by Forbes.

Table 1

The Determinants of the Organizational/ Quality Culture

OCAI	Forbes	Principles of Quality Management (ISO 9000)
Dominant characteristics; Organizational leadership; Management of employees; Organization glue; Strategic emphases; Criteria of success.	Leadership; Compelling vision; Companywide shared values; Engagement with customers; Staff empowerment; Performance metrics; Appropriate incentives.	Leadership; Customer focus; Engagement of people; Process approach; Improvement; Evidence-based decision making; Relationship management.

It can be noticed that there are no substantive differences between the models presented above, although the OCAI does not refer to the QC. This resemblance supports the statement that the defining elements of QC are found in the cultural framework of modern management.

Analyzing the models in the table above, the following parameters of quality culture in administrative institutions can be considered: 1) leadership (which includes strategic vision, shared values and commitment); 2) citizen focus and feedback; 3) engagement of people, supported by training, motivation and incentives; 4) quality metrics at all levels; 4) continuous improvement of quality and openness to change.

Leadership plays a key role in achieving the behavioral transformations on which the quality performance of organizations depends. The main role of the leader is to create a culture in which quality is found in everyone's activity. These signals of openness to quality must reach all employees. The connection with the outside world is also important, a modern administration including the emphasis on the citizen and his participation in the realization and improvement of the services' quality. The introduction of quality metrics is essential in this regard, given that what is not measured, cannot be improved. In quality-oriented institutions performance indicators are established at all levels and for all processes and functions.

The implementation of QC processes in public institutions is not an easy task, it includes several actions, namely: designing the coordinator, defining the process purpose, establishing performance indicators, developing and implementing procedures and evaluation models and tools. Last but not least, training people, engaging and rewarding them are very important for the effective operation of the process.

The comments above focus on how QC management should be done at the organization level. But in our view, solving this complex problem cannot be left to the discretion of one organization. An additional argument is that the success of governance reform requires the effective QC management in all administrative institutions at the country level. In this regard, the definition and implementation of QC processes in administrative institutions should be centrally coordinated, at government level.

Solving this problem does not fit into templates, there are several possible solutions. For example, tasks at the ministerial level could include the creation of general framework,

procedures and tools necessary to evaluate the QC, and the control of their implementation in public institutions. In addition, the support of public institutions through consulting activities and staff training in QC must also be done at the central level.

Another solution consists in performing the evaluation at country level on a single platform, the survey results being kept by the national coordinator in a confidential benchmarking database. The data are used by the management of each administrative institution in the process of improving QC, but it is also useful for comparative analysis and synthesis of QC in PA at the country level.

This last variant was implemented in administration and in other fields of activity. A reference model can be the national system regarding the evaluation of organizational culture in public institutions developed by the VPSC in Australia, briefly described in section 3 of the paper. Benchmarks should also be implemented in other domains, e.g. the pharmaceutical industry, in which there have been carried out consistent actions for the systematic evaluation of QC (Baker, 2017; Parenteral Drug Association, 2018).

5. Conclusion

Since the 1980s, researchers have suggested that OC is a key factor to organizational performance and should be managed to improve an organization's competitive advantages. The present paper refers to the PA approach from a cultural perspective, in the context of extensive reform in this field. The goal is to determine how the OC should be managed in order to achieve the effective implementation of quality management in public institutions.

The paper is based on the review of publications on OC, and respectively QC in PA. The analysis of the publications reveals that in some countries important cultural transformations have taken place, related to the NPM movement. There is a consensus on the need to systematically evaluate the OC, in order to identify the factors that impede the real application in PA of new management principles and to make changes. Many authors consider that the self-assessment of OC in a systematic way must become a particular task of the top management in any PA institution. The systematic evaluation and improvement of the OC, and respectively of the QC, is essential in improving the QMSs functioning and performance in public organizations. Several publications present applicative examinations of the OC, and respectively QC in one or more institutions. But the models used are different and, in addition, the existence of the evaluation tool does not guarantee its systematic use in public institutions.

The paper proposes solutions for two major interrelated problems: the model-tools for QC evaluation, and respectively the effective management of QC in administrative institutions.

Concerning the model-tool, the authors consider that the basic principles of quality management, defined in ISO 9000, should be taken into account when establishing the evaluation model and tools for the QC. The main argument is that most public institutions have implemented QMSs based on the ISO 9001 model. In addition, the publication review shows that many currently used culture evaluation models ~~currently used~~ are structured on similar principles.

Concerning the effective management of QC in administrative institutions, the paper's authors propose the implementation of a QC dedicated process. Such a process involves the

periodic examination of the QC, but it is not limited to evaluation: it includes the activities of PDCA cycle. The final goal is the QC continuous improvement, through actions based on the evaluation results, and taking also into account other inputs associated with the strategic objectives of the organization.

Considering the complexity of such a process and the lack of necessary resources, the authors appreciate that the systematic evaluation of the QC in PA cannot be left exclusively to the institutions. There is a likelihood that culture assessment does not have to be conducted, or carried out sporadically and with questionable results. The proposal made by the authors is the coordination of these processes to be made at the government level, by the central structure responsible for quality in governance and PA. Solving this problem does not fit into templates, two possible solutions being described in the paper.

The process approach to QC management in administrative institutions and the coordination of these processes at government level are proposals made by the authors, useful for decision makers responsible with quality in PA and governance in implementing the systematic examination of QC, as an essential way for continuously improving the QMSs performance, and respectively the quality in PA and governance. The application of these ideas implies substantial future research aimed at supporting the development and implementation of the QC management process taking into account the country specificities of public institutions and governance. The research programs should include: defining the QC management process; creating the tool for evaluating the culture of quality and its pilot application; elaboration of procedures and guides; development of the survey platform and databases; consulting actions and training of the staff from the organizations and coordination structures etc.

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