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THE SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY OF IMPLEMENTING A QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM: A STUDY OF TWO GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS IN A POST-SOCIALIST EUROPEAN COUNTRY

Abstract

Research on implementation of quality management systems in the public sector in *the West* has received significant scholarly attention, while in post socialist Europe, the former Soviet Union republics and Central and Eastern European countries, nearly 30 years after collapse of soviet system, it remains very modest. Particularly, this research stream lacks inductive process-oriented qualitative studies covering the process from idea to implement management system to assessing its impact on major organizational outcomes. This paper reports preliminary findings of two ongoing qualitative case studies carried out at two Government organisations in a post-Soviet country. Based on interviews with key decision-makers and participants in the process of quality system implementation, this study presents a stylized process stage-based model of ISO 9000 implementation and develops a set of propositions. The key finding is that the process of ISO 9000 implementation was characterised by top management ignorance and scepticism of employees, which led to marginal or no impact on key organizational outcomes, which are usually associated with quality systems. The most often cited benefit associated with ISO 9000 system is the development of a better understanding of how their organization works.

The paper argues that the best way to explain the marginal impact of quality system implementation on performance and organizational level outcomes is to invoke „the self-fulfilling prophecy" logic, according to which the disbelief in systematic formal management inherited from the Soviet past leads to limited commitment by all actors, focus on formalist outcomes, and no clear performance improvement targets. Thus, initial assumptions and predispositions of key decision-makers and employees enacted reality, which to a high extent consistent with their original views.

The article concludes by highlighting future research directions and outlining several important managerial implications and recommendations on how to break out of the deeply rooted „iron cage" and believes inherited from the socialist past and transmitted through socialization, power and language.

Key words: Quality management systems, ISO 9000, modernization of management, public sector, post socialist economies, self-fulfilling theories.

INTRODUCTION

Public service quality improvement has been on the agenda of the European government reform since the 1980s. Nevertheless, the key issues on these agendas remain pertinent to date, as improved citizen experience in public services remains an inspiration, fiscal pressures on governments continuously require them to intensify their performance and improve employee skills, and intrinsic complexities of quality improvement models slow down and impede sustained quality improvement (Pollitt et al., 2004). In addition to that, EU public sector organisations are facing new challenges (social exclusion, lack of trust in political parties, ICT advance, demographic changes, migration, development of a more differentiated civil society) that in turn call for new directions in public service quality management (Pollitt et al., 2004).

ISO 9000 series standard is one of the most popular quality management systems that to date has been introduced in over a million organisations worldwide, including those in the public sector (ISO, 2017). The standard provides guidance and tools for process execution that are based on seven principles – customer focus, employee engagement in quality improvement, leadership that inspires employee engagement, process approach to performance, continuous improvement, evidence-based decision making and relationship management (ISO, 2015b). And among others its key potential benefits are consistent delivery of services that meet both customer requirements and those set by statutes and regulations, higher customer satisfaction, enhanced risk management and opportunity evaluation, and the capability to comply with a set of quality management system requirements (ISO, 2015a).

The introduction and maintenance of ISO 9000 series quality system have received extant prior research attention; however, the vast majority of this research has looked into ISO in the private sector organisations. Research on ISO implementation and maintenance in the public sector remains modest (To et al., 2011). Besides most of this research has addressed ISO implementation in health-care organisations (e.g. Al-Qatawneh, 2017, Ru Chen and Cheng, 2012, Stoimenova et al., 2014) and local governments (e.g. Chiarini, 2016, Montesinos and Brusca, 2009). Thus, there is a dearth of research understanding of ISO implementation in other types of public sector organisations.

Prior research also suffers from an insufficient sensitivity to the context in which specific quality systems are introduced (Pollitt et al., 2004). To date, research has been predominantly conducted in the Western context, while studies on ISO implementation in post socialist Europe, the former Soviet Union and Central and Eastern European (CEE), still remains modest and underexplored. In particular, this research area lacks inductive, process-oriented qualitative studies. Post-socialist countries make an interesting and unique research context, as their studies have the potential to offer distinct empirical evidence that is conductive to theory development (Soulsby and Clark, 2007). These countries also make an interesting research object as their public administration practices and management beliefs are still deeply marked by the socialist imprinting, i.e. distinct behaviour patterns that were learned and reinforced through the work experience in the command economy (Kriauciunas and Kale, 2006). Speaking of quality management practices in particular, it is noteworthy that product and service quality was usually compromised for quantity in the socialist period. Thus, not surprisingly, management often ignored the quality and lacked the know-how of its management.

The aim of this paper is to understand the process of ISO implementation in government organisations in the post-socialist context. In particular, this research seeks to gain an in-depth

understanding of how a modern management idea is perceived, selected, implemented, evolves and what kind of impact it generates in post-Soviet organisations, in particular examining the impact of historical-contextual factors on various stages of the implementation process and the final outcome.

We build our research on two on-going case studies conducted at two government organisations in a post-Soviet country. Based on interviews with key decision-makers and participants in the process of quality system implementation, we present a stylized process stage-based model of ISO implementation and develop a set of propositions that seek to explain the behaviour of key actors. Though CEE governments are rather heterogeneous and unique in regards to their different historical, cultural, and bureaucratic anomalies, their prior level of contacts outside the Soviet bloc, and personalities of public sector reformers; nevertheless, public administration across these countries demonstrates higher levels of similarities than differences in their reforms (Rice, 2006). Thus, our propositions may be generalisable at the post-socialist region/ country level.

In the interpretation of our findings, we build on the self-fulfilling prophecy theory which argues that through the formation of norms and beliefs towards certain behaviours, prevailing assumptions, ideas and language may influence behaviour in organisations and design of management practices (Ferraro et al., 2005). In line with this approach, we argue that managers of public sector organisations hold certain beliefs and expectations with regard to management ideas and their applicability and effectiveness in the public sector organisations, and, based on those expectations, they either accept or reject management ideas which overall influences the success or failure of a specific management model implementation. More specifically we seek to understand what preconceived beliefs and expectations managers and employees in public organisations hold towards the ISO quality management system, a modern management tool. Next, we study how these expectations affect management and employee behaviour and to what extent those beliefs and expectations have been maintained / changed throughout the ISO implementation process and what were the overall managerial, employee and societal outcomes of the ISO implementation process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ISO 9000 series standard and its application

ISO 9001 is one of by far the most widespread quality management models. It is a process approach to quality management that may be introduced in any organisation in any sector or industry irrespective of its size. The standard builds on seven quality management principles: customer focus, leadership, engagement of employees, process approach, continuous improvement, evidence-based decision making and relationship management (ISO, 2015b). According to the statistics of the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO), there were over a million of valid ISO 9001 certificates issued to organisations worldwide in 2016 (ISO, 2016).

ISO 9000 series standard adoption is mainly motivated by such internal drivers as quality improvement and a variety of external drivers, i.e. promotional and marketing purposes, customer / competitor / partner pressure and market share increase (e.g. Sampaio et al., 2009, Poksinska et al., 2002, Kakouris and Sfakianaki, 2019). Different types of motivation were also found to lead to varied outcomes and emphasise the critical role of the internal motivation (del Castillo-Peces et al., 2018, Valmohammadi and Kalantari, 2015, Cai and Jun, 2018).

ISO benefits identified in business settings also fall under internal and external. The first group comprises benefits related to improvements and enhancement of quality, productivity, staff motivation, internal communication, etc., and the second refers to improvements in corporate image, customer satisfaction, market share, etc. (e.g. Sampaio et al., 2009, Poksinska et al., 2006). It is noteworthy, however, that research findings on ISO impact on organisational performance are mixed.

Research has also identified a number of enabling and hindering factors in ISO implementation. Among these are employee training and development, top and middle management commitment, overall staff participation and involvement, regular audit conduction and improvement, process standardisation, documentation, etc. (Poksinska et al., 2002, Poksinska et al., 2006).

Advent of ISO 9000 series quality systems into the public sector

Service quality improvement in the public sector has been given extant attention in both public administration practice and research. In Western Europe the first wave of quality improvement movement took place at the start of the 1990s (Löffler and Vintar, 2004). At this stage majority of quality management practices and tools built on Citizen Charter type models. The second wave followed at the end of the 1990s with a rise in popularity of such quality management tools as Excellence Model of the European Foundation for Quality (EFQM), ISO quality system and Common Assessment Framework. Different countries however have opted for diverse quality management models and tools. For instance, the Spanish government strongly promotes the EFQM Excellence Model, while in Latvia the central government passed a decree which prescribes the use of ISO 9001 series for public sector agencies at all government levels (Reinholde, 2004). It is also noteworthy that in some of the Latvian agencies this quality standard has been successfully implemented (King et al., 2004).

ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 standards are by far the most popular ones among public sector organisations across the globe. However, though some success cases have been reported and it has been shown that ISO 9000 may be successfully implemented in the public sector (Singh and Mansour-Nahra, 2006), ISO standard appropriateness and adaptability to the public sector has not received sufficient research attention.

In Central and East European (CEE) countries service quality improvement gained momentum at the start of this century, which was the time the countries were actively seeking EU membership. ISO 9000 series standards were is most favoured quality management system that has been applied across diverse types of public sector organisations such as local government institutions, educational and health care organisations, libraries, etc. (Löffler and Vintar, 2004). However, in contrast to Western Europe, where ISO quality systems were implemented to reduce costs, in Central and Eastern Europe it was more of a fashion, i.e. desire to follow private sector organisations that had successfully introduced and applied Western standards (Staronova and Löffler, 2004). Furthermore, despite its great popularity in public sector organisations, the latter faced multiple challenges in its implementation and maintenance. CEE countries by and large are lacking a national level service standard; therefore, quality management and selection of its specific tools and models are highly dependent on the agency management, which in turn has led to substantial variance between diverse institutions, while their specialist are not very keen to engage in the implementation and maintenance of the standard (Löffler and Vintar, 2004). In addition to the above, agencies in those countries also face important organisational structure and culture related challenges (Tõnnisson, 2004).

ISO implementation process in the public sector: current research status

The vast majority of ISO-related studies in the public sector organisations have addressed issues related to its implementation process. More specifically prior research has looked into such ISO implementation issues as: a) motivation, b) benefits and c) enablers and inhibitors.

Motivation for implementing ISO 9000 series standards

ISO adoption in the public sector is driven by various internal and external factors. For instance, Chu and Wang (2001) performed a retrospective study of organisational experience in ISO 9000 certification in 22 public sector organisations in Taiwan. Their findings revealed that the overriding motivation for ISO implementation was willingness to improve service quality, followed by such motivation as global trend following, enhancement of the organizational image and administrative effectiveness, meeting client needs and organisational restructuring.

A study of Staines (2000) conducted in a Swiss district public hospital showed that first and foremost motivation to implement ISO was driven by its top management familiarity and interest in the standard which they considered an appropriate tool for resolving some ethical (providing clients a tool for evaluating the service), motivational (enhancing staff participation and motivation to contribute to quality improvement), and managerial (optimising processes and saving resources, enhancing organisational credibility and awareness among the public) issues.

Benefits of ISO 9000 series standard implementation

ISO benefits in the public sector have been studied to a lesser degree, but also refer to various internal and external outcomes. For instance, results of Chiarini (2016) survey of 201 quality managers of local government organisations in Italy revealed that the implementation of ISO 9001 has a positive effect on citizen satisfaction with public services, formalisation of process rules and roles, improved employee perception of client needs, performance measurement, and performance efficiency and a negative impact on internal process deficiencies and client complaints. Results also showed that the effect of ISO 9001 on citizen engagement, inter-divisional communication, cost reduction and overall efficiency is insignificant.

The implementation of ISO 9001 and ISO 9004-2 in five local government organisations in Finland (Sundquist, 2004) revealed that standard implementation is positively related with citizen satisfaction with services as well as owner assignment to processes and their work results. Singh and Mansour-Nahra (2006) among the key benefits of ISO found process review and upgrading, realised payback for the efforts, adoption of a paperless system for the procedures, while Chu and Wang (2001) determined such benefits, as an improved image of the public sector, increased client satisfaction, improvement of service quality, and higher administrative efficiency.

Staines (2000) study reported the following ISO implementation benefits: imposed dealing with philosophical and operational issues of quality management, accelerated implementation of new legislation, a feeling of partnership, pride and motivation among all staff, traceability of actions taken, comprehensive re-examination of the overall situation in the organisation, quality sustaining, facilitation of new staff training, provision of a comprehensive understanding of operations performed by an individual employee and the entire organisation, provision of a sound basis for TQM, demonstration of organisational commitment towards quality in the organisation to the general public.

Factors affecting ISO implementation

Among the enabling factors of ISO implementation in public organisations, Singh and Mansour-Nahra (2006) showed the critical role of the appropriate internally-driven motivation, i.e. willingness to improve internal process rather than apply it for public image promotion. In a study by Chu and Wang (2001) respondents pointed to such success factors as top level management competences and engagement, policy and management support, ISO awareness, interorganisational cooperation and low employee resistance.

Speaking of barriers to ISO 9000 series standard implementation in public organisations, Abdullah et al. (2013) in a survey of 53 quality managers identified such inhibiting factors as a lack of collaboration between internal organisational units, negative employee attitudes and culture in respect to quality. The organisations were also lacking human resources and faced low employee engagement, cooperation and commitment. The above barriers were found to differ among different types of organisations. On top of the above barriers that are also found in other studies, Abdullah et al. (2013) found that local government institutions also face such additional barriers as frequent changes of the council president /mayor, absence of the quality office/ organization and change of the standards. Singh and Mansour-Nahra (2006) findings demonstrate that employee attitudes may hinder ISO implementation. In their study a great deal of different level employees believed that quality management does not fall under their daily activities and makes a distinct extra activity. The case organisation however succeeded in resolving this issue by naming the system simply a management system instead of a quality management system.

ISO standard maintenance

Prior research in public organisations, as shown above, has mainly addressed ISO 9000 implementation, while standard maintenance has been explored to a significantly lesser degree. Among the first studies in the field was conducted by Basir and Davies (2018). Building on a case study of the administration of a Malaysian municipality, they tried to identify what measure are applied in the process of ISO 9000 maintenance, which were as follows: document control, internal quality audit, document analysis and feedback, management review, corrective and preventative action, and training. The study also revealed that continuous quality improvement initiatives have made ISO 9000 a tool for providing high-quality services, which in turn enabled improving overall organisational performance.

Process studies of ISO implementation are also rare. One of the most detailed studies of ISO implementation process was conducted by Staines (2000) who provided an ex-post analysis of the entire implementation project, from its idea conception to lessons learned, among which the critical role of organisational culture, a dimension ignored in the ISO standard, was revealed.

Soviet legacy of quality and innovation management

In the Soviet Union, manufacturing constituted the major labour source, while the service sector was less developed and important. Speaking of the industry, its production quality was predominantly low, which was largely due to supply shortages, lack of competitor pressure, disproportion between the demand and supply, and party priorities for larger production outputs (Rutland, 2009). Enterprises were run with a "defect detection" rather than "defect prevention" orientation (Birch and Pooley, 1995). And though there were some centralised programmes developed to control and improve quality they turned out to be ineffective. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, ex-Soviet managers were largely unfamiliar with the

ideas and tools of total quality management, and employees at large were neither technically, nor psychologically prepared for quality improvement initiatives (Radovilsky, 1994).

The centrally planned economy of the Soviet Union was also known to lag from Western economies in terms of technological progress and innovation, the explanation for which, among other factors, by and large lies in its economic institutions and enterprise specifics (Schroeder, 1989). The innovation process was hampered by a lack of innovation drivers – property was owned by the state, output norms dictation and input distribution were centralised, prices were determined administratively and incentives were primarily tied to meeting production targets. Innovation was directed centrally and was mainly imitative of Western methods rather than incremental. At the enterprise level, management did not fear to lose a market share, as domestic and international competition was absent and even low quality goods could be sold through centralised allocation. Management ability to introduce innovation was also limited by a lack of technological information and needed inputs, while the existing incentive system that first and foremost rewarded meeting production plans did not motivate them to innovate. Respectively a lack of creativity and innovation skills was identified as one of the failure reasons among post-Soviet managers (Longenecker, 2001).

Self-fulfilling prophecy perspective

Originally introduced by Merton (1948), the concept of self-fulfilling prophecy (SFT), or the Pygmalion effect, refers to a situation which in the beginning is conceived in a false way, but then induces a behaviour which makes the original conception become reality. Since then SFT has been used to explain different social phenomena, including those in the organisational context (Eden, 1984).

Under this approach, organisational behaviour and design of management practices may be influenced by the existing norms and beliefs towards them, and language, i.e. language used in a certain context evokes specific associations and motives on the basis of which and in conformity with prevailing norms certain managerial behaviour and practices are then selected (Ferraro et al., 2005). When new paradigms and ideas that challenge the existing practices emerge actors may choose to start experimenting on them, which in turn may lead to a shift to new practices, or actors may use them only symbolically or ignore them, in which case old practices remain prevailing (Marti and Gond, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

Context of quality management system implementation

ISO series standards are the most widely implemented quality management tool in Lithuanian public sector. According to 2013 data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, around 30.5 per cent of organisations had them implemented, and another 19.8 per cent were intending to (VRM, 2013). To some extent, this great popularity of ISO may be explained by the fact that it was one of the first models applied in different sector organisations in the country. In addition to that, ISO certification allows proving in a relatively short term that an organisation has an operating quality management system (Nakrošis and Černiūtė, 2010). In Lithuanian public sector organisations ISO series standards are implemented / applied at the organisational level, and EU funding is generally used to cover their implementation costs (VRM, 2013). The main drivers of ISO implementation are as follows: willingness to enhance organisational

performance and identify organisational weaknesses, top management decision, and increased citizen / client needs and expectations related to service quality. Speaking of the key benefits, organisations claimed to have gained a more in-depth understanding of overall organisational performance and attained improvements in such areas as organisational image, service quality and performance. Organisations have also reported the following problematic areas in ISO implementation: significantly increased workloads, low employee support and motivation, insufficient employee competences, lack of information on quality management system applicability and implementation in the public sector, insufficient financial resources.

Research design

The study employs a multiple-case study design, as it is considered an appropriate method for the study of contemporary issues embedded in specific contexts (Yin, 2003) and topics lacking appropriate theory (Eisenhardt, 1989).

As recommended in such situations, our case selection was based on theoretical considerations (Eisenhardt, 1989). We identified three organizations within central government departments by studying the government documents and survey results on adaption of specific management tools by public sector organizations such as ISO 9000, Common Assessment Framework, Project management, Balanced Score card, Lean and others. Two of the three central government organisations have agreed to participate in the study. Our focus on central government organizations is justified in that such organizations would be more committed, have more competent management, would face more scrutiny and, thus, would be more rigorous in selections and implementation of the quality management system. We chose two government organisations, which had implemented ISO 9000 quality system about the same time, with a support of the same consulting company and with similar amount of resources allocated from the same funding scheme. More specifically, both organisations implemented ISO 9000 system with a full support of EU and national government grants.

Data collection

Following recommendations of Yin (2003), we sought for multiple sources of information. Respectively we conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with multiple respondents per organisations. More specifically, we interviewed 8 respondents per organisation who included top and middle level managers as well as employees most actively engaged in the implementation. The first interviews were conducted in the period of October to November 2017 and continued to very recently.

The main issues included in the interview guide were related to different stages of ISO implementation process:

- *Introductory stage.* How did the idea of ISO system implementation come about at the government organisation? Who and when introduced the idea? Were these people internal or external to organization? What were the initial employee responses? What kind of ISO idea exploration and evaluation activities were carried out? Did organization consider other management tools at the same time?
- *Decision making stage.* Who was involved in the decision making? Who and when made the decision to implement ISO 9000? What was the motivation to do it? What kind of evidence was used to justify a decision on selecting ISO 9000? What kind of

organizational goals associated with ISO 9000 implementations were set and what kind of benefits were expected?

- *ISO 9000 implementation stage.* Who was involved in the implementation process and how? What were employee responses? To what extent the top management was involved and committed throughout implementation stage? How were the employees motivated to take part in the implementation process? What kind of difficulties organizations experienced in the implementation process?
- *Implementation outcomes.* What were major measurable improvements attained through ISO implementation such service quality, costs and others? What were positive and negative outcomes as a result of ISI 9000 implementation? What were key success factors, which contributed to the kind of success that has been achieved? How did the implementation of ISO affect organisational culture, employee motivation and engagement?
- *ISO 9000 development and maintenance.* What activities are continued following the implementation? How has ISO 9000 helped improve your daily work? How of often to use the IT part of the system? What are the key sustained benefits emerging from the implementation of the ISO 9000 system?

We also searched for evidence from secondary sources such as archival analysis of government and organisational-level documents, and secondary data from an employee engagement survey in government organisations. Most notably, the two governmental organizations provided a set of documents associated with the project team meetings related to ISO implementation, its minutes, annual assessments and ISO audit results.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS MODEL AND PROPOSITIONS

Initial conditions for implementing quality management systems in a post socialist country

During the socialist period, formal management systems and ideology have always been treated with great scepticism. In those times, citizens knew very well that socialist democracy was not democracy at all, freedom of speech was not real, and socialist enterprises were managed differently than formally declared. Thus, thus there is a natural tendency to develop inner sceptical attitude towards all formal management systems. This is so deeply embedded in cognition that such an attitude is applied towards all formal management ideas from Western democracies, both managers and employees could only rely on what worked informally. Public sector leaders, heads of governmental organizations interviewed in our research, also expressed the following concerns:

> *Maybe we have not succeeded in doing it all in the right way, but maybe it is not really needed… The West. Most probably things do not glitter there either... And then you see that we also have some good things over here… We shouldn't follow the Western system blindly, we should follow their developments, but those practices have to be adapted to our country context, mentality of our people, our own beliefs, the size of the country, national economy.*

> *It has taken hundreds of years for other states to do that, while we desire to attain the same in less than thirty years and keep jumping from one [management idea] to another.*

These are just a few of quite typical quotations provided by senior leaders at government organizations. On the one hand, such views invoke a different logic, however, they also imply that management ideas are not so relevant or urgent. The first citation builds on what sociologists (May and Finch, 2009) call "normalization" heuristics, i.e. we have good things in our country, and not everything is shining in the West", so perhaps we do not need really those management ideas. The second citation alludes to the "we need more time" logic. It provides a justification as to why management ideas are not higher on their agenda, which is due to the fact that other countries have spent hundreds of years to get where they are now. Finally, leaders of government organisations express a believe that Western management models need to be adapted to our "mentality" and our way of thinking, while for improvement or innovation to take place, the goal should be opposite, i.e. with a help new modern management methods to challenge and transform current dominant thinking in the public sector, much of which has its roots in the soviet past. Thus, we put forward the following proposition:

Proposition 1: Prevailing views of the public sector leaders that unsystematic informal and personalized management is normal, inherited from the soviet past, will invoke a critical predisposition towards Modern management ideas, such as ISO 9000.

Public sector leaders often see the adoption of management ideas as a cost rather than a meaningful investment. One of the main complains to leading commentators is lack of investment or cost and benefit analysis logic. None of over 30 respondents, whom we interviewed during our broader research project, could recall a case where a management system would have been fully implemented using internal funds. Several organizational leaders mentioned that their institutions would be fully capable of financing the implementation of ISO 9000 or similar management system, however, not a single investment at the government organization level has been made in a post-socialist European country under study, over the last 28 years. Thus, given dominant views, were management system be implemented in a public sector organization, it should to be exclusively financed by external funding.

Proposition 2: Prevailing views in society and the public sector, inherited from the soviet past, will induce the management of government organizations to view the adoption of Modern management idea as a cost rather than an investment.

In the public sector, employees have witnessed multiple organisational changes, which had a great start and high promise. However, usually these changes served the interests of the newly appointed leaders rather than those of the organisation. In of the two organizations under study, new management initiatives were terminated as the organizational leader was lacking basic computer literacy skills. Thus, generally, in the light of previous initiatives, there is a strong sentiment and expectation that ISO 9000 implementation will soon be abandoned because leaders will change their priorities or new leaders appointed through political process will discontinue the initiative. Thus, the following proposition is formulated:

Proposition 3. Prevailing views in society and the public sector, inherited from the soviet past, will induce employees at government organizations to view the

adoption of Modern management ideas as something that in any case will soon „be abandoned" without making any real change or impact.

There is also widely shared view that quality management systems and continuous improvement methods such as Lean are not applicable to the public sector, as is implied in the following citation:

I have read about Lean management system, I do not really understand, if it is possible to implement it in a state funded organization. Though it is clear to me how such a system works in a business organization.

This citation carries lots of important implications. In the current world, there are number many sites and reports on management methods in the public sector. However, the above senior leader prefers holding to his believes unchallenged rather than searching for further information, facts or research evidence. Thus, we put forward the following proposition:

Proposition 4. Prevailing views in society and the public sector, inherited from the soviet past, induce all key stakeholders of government organizations to view the adoption of Modern management ideas such as ISO 9000 negatively because it has its origins in the private sector (hence, not invented here syndrome).

The initiation stage of ISO implementation

In the interview, the top-level managers of a government organization noted that they had very little to do with the implementation and use of this quality management system. Generally, they acknowledged that quality management was not within the span of their attention. The head of a unit within the government organization also noted that:

"I think that if institutional leaders had more time, they would get an in-depth knowledge of the quality system, but they are very busy".

At the same, organizational leaders, especially, appointed through political process, acknowledge that they did not consider implementation and functioning of quality management system as very important to their work and not worthy to be among their priorities. Respectively, we put forward the following proposition:

Proposition 5. Prevailing views in society and the public sector, inherited from the socialist past, induce top management neglect and ignorance towards Modern management ideas such as ISO 9000 and towards their adoption in government organisations.

In both organizations under this research, the implementation of ISO quality management system was carried out using the external funds. The authors of this article are not aware of a single systematic implementation of quality management system that would have been funded through organisational resources. Thus, we propose:

Proposition 6. Prevailing views in society and the public sector, inherited from the socialist past, will induce top management at government organizations to consider the adoption of Modern Management Ideas only upon the availability of external funding.

The Implementation Stage

In the interviews, the management of government organizations acknowledged that the adoption of ISO or management ideas in general would not be among their priorities. As noted by one employee "the engagement of leaders in ISO since its implementation started was very close to zero".

A leader of one of the government organizations has commented on the outcomes in the following way:

> *Well, we did receive that ISO: 2015 certificate. It's all fine. I think it has all be done to look good on paper. <…> In reality, however, I think that we did not attain what we aimed at… It was doing for the sake of doing…*

In light of above, we formulate the following proposition:

Proposition 7. Driven by the prevailing views in society and the public sector, inherited from the socialist past, the top management of government organizations will mostly disengage from the process of Modern nanagement idea such as ISO 9000 implementation, but secure compliant participation of their subordinates.

In the post socialist context, employees of government organisations are quite customarily merely informed about the decision to implement ISO 9000, or any other management system, and not involved in the decision making on an idea adoption. Once in a while, government organisations will try to implement idea suggestion schemes, however, as noted by one of the respondents "they do not know why the organisation eventually has abandoned this idea". The below citation reveals the efforts of middle managers to engage into ISO 9000 system implementation, however, without much success.

> *Others quite likely are not able to get fully engaged, as it is an extra activity that one has to get acquainted with on top of other things. So, they don't manage to immerse into it or get the needed knowledge from outside to get fully engaged.*

Thus, based on the above quotes, we formulate the following proposition:

Proposition 8. Driven by the prevailing views in society and the public sector, inherited from the socialist past, majority of employees of government organisations will mostly be disengaged from ISO 9000 implementation process, but will demonstrate a duty-driven participation.

Implementation outcomes

A number of the respondents noted that they very seldom study process descriptions, when they perform their work or encounter problems. However, process description and

visualization within an IT tool was exactly what the implementation project produced. The head of a unit at one of the governmental organisations noted:

> *we developed all the [process] descriptions, because after all this is what is required by the (ISO) standard.*

An organisational leader commented on the final outcomes of the implementation process in the following way:

> *On paper things will be made as required, but they will not work as they should. Everything was done very well. Everything taken care of and a firm hired to audit it. It is all in order. Nobody could find faults with it.*

Thus, we propose the following:

Proposition 9. The implementation of Modern Management Idea (ISO) will yield primarily only formal representation (visualisation) of processes in a „as it is" format.

In one of the interviews, the head of a department referred to the following outcomes of ISO implementation in their organisation:

> *We assess efficiency in multiple different ways (audits, presence/ absence of sanctions, mistakes or complaints and their amounts), however, these performance indicators are part of a quality management system.*

> *In the implementation process, we seek to administer the funds in such a way that all the money is spent. Whether those expenses brought any gains is assessed at a different level. Besides these issues do not fully reflect indicators of a quality management system.*

Based on the above we put forward the following proposition:

Proposition 10. In the post socialist countries, the implementation of ISO 9000 will not generate any significant improvements for the government organizations relative to other government organizations, which did not implement ISO 9000.

Implications of ISO implementation for the organisation and public sector and societal views

Our findings also offered some interesting implications with regard to ISO 9000 implementation at the organisational and societal levels. As one of the respondents noted:

> *I think people are disappointed in general and everybody thinks – well they are implementing some new project again and are getting a lot of money for it. We'll go there, study how to do it, and what will happen next, is that a new government will come and it will do it all in a different way. Indeed, there is some distrust towards it…*

This quote illustrates very well how dominant views of society and the public sector further reinforce the existing beliefs and expectations. Respectively we propose that:

Proposition 11. The Implementation of ISO 9000 will reinforce employee views at government organizations that Modern management ideas implementation is formalistic and is primarily done for self-interest related purposes.

CONCLUSSIONS

This study reports to findings from two governmental organizations, which implemented ISO 9000. The implementation process was stimulated by availability of EU funding. The management of two government organizations did not have any clearly stated performance improvement outcomes prior to the implementations process. Furthermore, it appears that there was no rigorous discussion as to which management tool to implement. Management, convinced by external parties and driven by its own interest to be able to refer to the fact government organizations operates based on quality principles, took an initial active role and ensured compliant participation of the middle management and employees. However, overall none of the governmental organization has succeed to achieve any remarkable results. This further reinforced initial ideas formal management methods are not necessary, and, in most cases, they become a burden for everyone. All this process we conceptual as to some extent self-fulfilling prophecy cycle, whereby dominant believes invoke particular forms of idea selection, decision to implement, implementation process and institutionalization of the quality management, while no significant positive outcomes reinforces the pre-exiting dominant ideas and pre-dispositions of all key stake-holders.

The Appendix 1 displays our preliminary model, which understandably needs further development by drawing on richer data and more cases studies.

Limitations

This study suffers from several limitations. First, the number of cases is very small, which makes it difficult to make any claims related to generalizations. Although, our broader study, in which conducted over 30 interviews with senior public sector leaders, supports most of the theoretical propositions. Secondly, because this quality of research depends on access and availability of high level pollical and public sector leaders, we face to some extent access problems. Furthermore, we face experienced some barriers to openly discuss sensitive issues such as to who proposed ISO 9000 idea, as there are barriers who can have access to senior level political and public sector leader, especially, quite often these consulting organizations, which have and propose ideas, in the end gain opportunity to implement ISO 9000 projects. Thirdly, we have difficulties in getting access to people who left the government organizations and lost interest in contributing to research. Finally, the major limitation is data analysis and coding are carried in sporadic manner and is used to convey key ideas.

Future research directions

Findings of prior research on ISO implementation in the public sector in the Western context propose that ISO 9000 may (and has been) successfully implemented in the sector. However, this research predominantly builds on case studies of successful ISO implementation. There

have been some quantitative research attempts to address ISO-related issues; however, this strand of research follows a retrospective perspective and is rather descriptive, which calls for longitudinal research in the future and understanding of the causative effects. There is also a lack of research understanding of ISO implementation in public sector organisations in the post-socialist context. And to advance the understanding of the role and effects of the institutional and cultural environment as well as sector specifics in ISO implementation and maintenance comparative studies are needed.

It is also noteworthy that prior research has predominantly focused on ISO implementation and neglected its maintenance. However, to improve service quality it does not suffice merely getting ISO certification, as benefits gained may be less significant than anticipated or it may even have negative outcomes. Therefore, future research needs to address ISO standard maintenance too.

Finally, in line with the arguments found in prior research on the insufficiency of ISO 9000 series as a single quality management tool and recommendations to apply it in conjunction with other standards (e.g. ISO 14000) or quality management systems, future research may study public sector organisations that have implemented and use a number of distinct quality management systems and tools.

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APENDIX

Implementation of ISO at two government organisations: a preliminary theoretical model

Initiation stage

⇓

Lack of knowledge and ignorance

⇓

External funding

⇓

Consultant initiative

⇓

Informal selection of a single preferred service provider

⇓

Informal preparation for project funding application on behalf of the organisation – a service provider's

⇓

Implementation stage

⇓

Ceremonial public procurement process

⇓

No management engagement (enforcement)

⇓

No employee engagement (obedience)

⇓

Implementation outcomes

⇓

Formal outcomes: process maps, descriptions

⇓

No change or minimal change in cognition and behaviour

⇓

No change in performance outcomes (e.g. Government decree)

⇓

No change in employee engagement

⇓

Implications of implementation for stakeholder cognition and behaviour

⇓

Management	**Employees**	**Public sector community & society**
Reinforcement that Management ideas & systems do not work	Reinforcement that Management idea & system implementation is always formalistic	Diffusion of critical views towards Management idea & system implementation

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