

Annual Quality Assessment of Public Servants Professional Performance in Ukraine *(short version)*

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The paradigm shift in design and functions assigned to the Ukrainian system of Public Administration towards the provision of quality public services is the main challenge of today legislative and executive authorities. The most implicit edge in this transformation process is to monitor efficiently the feedback connection and assess the final results achieved with respect to administrative and financial costs the policy may face. Sometimes, initiatives nested exclusively at the central level do take a little support, or even some kind of reluctance at the lower tiers, and at the same time, too many practical ideas and technical propositions born in local authorities remain invisible for policy makers.

The paper provides review of recently introduced by the Ukrainian executive authorities the procedure of quality assessment of public servants' performance. The author was personally assigned to implement this system practically in Donetsk oblast (i.e. regional level) and would like to share his vision of this initiative, main obstacles it faces and challenges to be made to fit its destination adequately. The deep critics is skipped out as the main idea of the presentation is to make a reader acquainted with positive practice of quality control and ways in which this procedure would be implemented rationally.

In accordance with the "Strategy of Reforming the system of Public Administration in Ukraine" (the Decree of the President of Ukraine, N 599, dtd 14.04.2000) the main purpose of launching the system of annual assessment of public servants would secure the quality of services provided and maintain the outstanding professional standards in the Ukrainian public service. The main instrument to skim the professional level of a public service is attestation which takes place periodically, recorded officially and plays a great importance in the career of a public servant. Following the results of the attestation the public servant may be promoted or, otherwise be penalized and warned about the shortfalls made during the period to correct. The key concept of attestation is to make the system of public service more transparent and adjusted to the needs of community. An assessed public servant is asked with questions which vary from knowledge of normative acts regulating the delivery of public services and his (her) professional duties to presenting a practical achievements which were initiated to improve quality of these services. An important role is given to previous consultations with intermediate consumers of these public services or their representatives (civil organization, relevant committees of municipal council, think-tanks) and outlining main recommendations the public servant should follow in the future. As the period between attestations is quite long, it may happen a time deformations by which a public servant may speculate in performing outstanding quality exactly before attestation.

To get rid of this problem and switch accent from professional characteristics of a public servant to defining and monitoring the quality issues of his (her) job, it was designed and implemented the procedure for assessment the quality of public servants' performance. This procedure is managed particularly by intermediate chief and has less transparent character and informality than periodical attestations. The information extracted from this procedure helps to monitor the quality of services provided, competence

and motivation of a servant, his (her) propositions and initiatives how to make procedures more efficient, and what obstacles and misunderstandings exist in the services providing system.

Quite difficult, especially for local authorities, was the challenge to introduce system of individual working schedules which should be discussed with and approved by the chief. These documents are characteristic of newly proposed management by objective framework, by using which, public servants are demanded to highlight what exact services they prepare to do, how to do them more efficient within the bound of resources available and how progress may be monitored with respect to time and quality components. Many officials just copied their professional duties which, of course seems very blinded and blurred. Such schedules were failed and public servants were obliged to be more specific in outlining the concrete services they provide and for which they receive their salaries. All schedules were reviewed and gave information which finally helped to set the full rank of public services an executive organ provides and which possible measurement of quality may be set. The final document was delivered to all official for practical reference and is used by attestation commission as benchmark to assess the quality.

During the whole year the chief check individual schedules of all subordinated officials and put there a relevant comments and marks to develop dynamics in the process. Systematical assessment is performed through comparing achieved and designed results, scanning the quality aspects of services provided, operative reaction to any signals which come from the public services consumers or other governmental authorities.

The criteria and measurement of the quality of public servants performance are divided into general (universal for all public servants) and special, which depends on the organizational features and characteristics of every certain department. These criteria are specified by every authority and should respond to the needs and preferences of relevant local authority.

Organization and conduct of annual assessment

Administration of annual assessment of public servants in local authorities is assigned to their human resources departments. These departments should make familiar all public servants with the procedure of annual assessment, criteria and measures set for the quality of services provided, and widespread with relevant documents and blanks which are necessary to pass this assessment. The procedure consists from following steps:

Preparation: Both a public servant and his (her) intermediate chief should have been prepared for this annual assessment. During the assessment period it has been taking place systematical analysis of performed duties designed by relevant instructions and normative acts, ad-hoc projects and assignments. The chief continuously monitors all deviations from the quality standards which occur, makes corrections if these standards appear to be wrong. The chief and a public servant define the date of assessment and operational plan of the whole department for the next year. Until the assessment date, a public servant should compose his (her) individual schedule in the context of this departmental plan.

Assessment: There are two ways the assessment to be made. Initially, every public servant should assess individually the quality of his (her) own work, and then to consult with the chief. Self assessment procedure secures an active, constructive participation of a public servant in the annual assessment. This gives opportunity to express an alternative point of view and expose problems which occur in practice, as well as to set up personal challenges for further improvement of individual professionalism. The chief assesses the performance of a public official, his (her) professional duties designed in professional

instruction and individual schedule set at the beginning of the period; time management, relevance to the quality standards set and reasons of shortfalls occurred. The assessment must be objective and based on concrete samples. The chief should highlight positive measures of a public servant's work, his (her) level of competence and professional skills. At the same time it should be defined the shortfalls in the performance of the subordinated and the ways to correct them. These propositions are delivered to the public servants to be acquainted with at the time before the interview.

Interview and consensus achievement: The chief discusses with the public servant results of preliminary annual assessment, proves his judgements and present his own views how the quality of the work doing may be improved. Initial idea of the assessment is not formal but should bear characteristics of recommendation and advice. This demands public servants to stimulate their creativity and initiatives. The problems are highlighted in order to find a mutual solution and get an acquaintance what actually is going wrong with a certain aspect in quality parameters. After consensus is achieved, both public servant and the chief sign up the annual assessment document.

Approval of the assessment results: The upper-level official should approve the results of the annual assessment and to make any comments and recommendations he (she) considers relevant.

Conclusive step: The assessment documents are checked by the human resources department and summary extracts are incorporated into the personal case of every public official. Also, the human resources department is responsible for the analysis and generalization of annual assessment results to project a relevant policy decisions in human resource management. The results are used in budgeting the human resources for the next years, forming the reserves for top-managerial positions and estimating the demand for training and studying at postgraduate MPA course at the Ukrainian Academy of Public Administration.

Results of annual assessment are used during the attestations, consideration of possible career promotions, rewarding special professional ranks for public servants, financial remuneration and forming top-managerial positions reserve.

If public servants receive a low assessment score in the quality of public services providing, they may be penalized by the way of setting a certain control period to correct shortfalls, excluded from the top-managerial positions reserve as well as other sanctions defined by the current Law.

The public servant has a right to appeal the results of assessment made by his (her) intermediate chief by presenting in a writing form a grounded comments and justification of his position to the upper-level chief. If after discussing this appeal with the upper-level chief the public servant is still unsatisfied then he (she) has the right to appeal to the more upper level executive or the court.

Criteria and measures of quality of public officials' performance in delivering public services.

The annual assessment procedure are based on the principle of comparing the quality of service a public official performs with the set of criteria and measures which outline a benchmark. These criteria are divided into three main blocks and every particular criteria ranges the quality coefficients of services provided as low, satisfied, good and high levels. The assessor points up against each criteria levels which responds to the public servant's performance quality and finally sum the total result. These blocks are:

Performance of duties and assignments:

Volumes of the work: Check an average ability of public servant to cope with the work timetables. It is defined whether official makes any effort to simplify a procedure and find more quick and effective solution or, on the contrary, he (she) does it in a long and time-consuming manner. The balance between the speed and quality must be taken into account.

Quality of performance: The accent is made on setting a benchmark in the service design and dynamics in the work. To find a confident level, an assessor should recall if there were any corrections during the year, how long they took place and whether mistakes have repeated any other time.

Ability to plan and organize the work: This tests whether a public servant sets correct tasks and effectively mobilize his (her) resources to achieve them. The lowest mark is labeled if servant not uses a strategic approach in his work but only react on some stochastic problems in a chaotic non-logical manner.

Professional competence:

Professional knowledge: The public servant should possess a grounded knowledge not only in his own sphere of competence but other more fundamental concepts and state policies such, for example as, the Constitution, the Concept of Administrative Reform in Ukraine, the Law on Public Service in Ukraine, the Law on Local Self-Governance and others. Any complex problem should be resolved with systemic and flexible approach coinciding with the relevant public policy; decomposed into set of relevantly easy and transparent tasks. The low mark is assigned to individuals whose knowledge is blurred up or appears very narrow.

Professional skills: Many public services provided by local authorities are difficult to incorporate into specific guidance and this criterion assesses individual practical skills, behavior and professional style by which a public servant perform his (her) duties. If these skills are not developed and official applies the “universal tool” to resolve symmetrically different problems – the low mark is assigned.

Ability to express ideas clearly: The value is logical consequences in thoughts, applicability of expressions and fluency in composing business style, grammatically correct language in documents and oral speeches. Implicit and unconnected streams of thoughts, restricted vocabulary capacity and slang are the manner public officials should avoid.

Ability to respond quickly and initiatively: Any practical task that arises during the public service delivering should be resolved with initiative and creativity. The work process should bear a dynamic component by generating and searching continuously most effective ways to improve the process. If a public servant is absolutely satisfied with current procedure and not taking any attempt to evaluate a possible alternatives then he/she will not receive maximum score. The lowest marks are designed for passive individuals, which try to avoid assignments or do it without enthusiasm.

Operativeness of thoughts: In the turbulent and continuously changing environment, public services providers face the challenge to compete with the private sector and the main attribute of the successful performance is ability to spot business opportunities which under the efficient market hypotheses don't last too long due to influence of arbitrage mechanisms. At least, if public services providers can not cope with the temps of private sector development, they should mimic best practices employed there.

Stamina: This criteria relates more to the individual characteristics of each employee and entitles maximum mark to hard-working and keen servants which follows an active life position. Pessimistic attitude to assignments characterizes officials which not respond to requirements of highly-motivated and hard-working team of public managers.

Responsibility: Review says that many even highly-competent public officials don't put a great attention to their responsibilities. Coping systematically with assigned responsibilities does restrict innovations and leadership. Here, the professional duties should be designed to find an optimal balance between the bulk of responsibilities assigned and penalty of following the action to avoid these responsibilities. A public official who is known as a person with the hazard risk of potential loss to perform assigned functions does receive a minimal mark. Highly disciplined persons should be set as benchmark to compare with others.

Independence: This directly follows the previous criteria and assesses ability for independent decision-making, assurance in personal competence and avoiding the frequent disturbance of colleagues and chiefs. This is a good measure for newly employed servants to assess whether they have fully integrated into the team as a competent officials or, still consider themselves only for back roles.

Negotiation skills: Public services providers are on a day-by-day communication with recipients of the services – local community. Unfortunately, the professionalism in negotiating skills of Ukrainian public officials is out concern and this is one of the main aspects local authorities should concentrate training on. To receive a highest mark, public official should be able to represent his (her) point of view explicitly, transparently and target-oriented. Counterarguments must be taken into account and consensus should end every dialog with public. A negotiator using an implicitly difficult and blurred style of language is not welcomed.

Managerial abilities: A public manager must poses a best developed techniques in strategic management to set a particular goals for his (her) team, share responsibilities clearly among participants and provide effective monitoring and evaluation. An official promoting no concern to performance of his (her) subordinated receives lowest mark.

Controlling: The highest mark is designed for a manager who can control operatively and efficiently without spending a lot of human, financial and time resources.

Motivation of team: A public manager should promote the highest standards of motivation among the team, respect interests and points of view of all individuals, stimulate corporative thinking and self-starting capacities of employees.

Leadership: To organize a team on delivery of high-quality services a manager should posses developed skills to influence peoples positively, charismatically lead their endeavors and to be open-minded as well as easy-going in communication. If an official is scarcely noticeable in a team – he receives low mark for the given criteria.

Ethical background:

Ethical principles in behavior, communication style: A moderate public servant should posses a high ethical level of behavior and communication with people, to be correct in critical situations which so

often arise in the practice. To realize this principle, officials should follow “The ethical standards of Public Servants in Ukraine” issued recently.

Collaboration: In delivering public services, each member of the team should generate positive impulses to achieve strategic goals. If he (she) avoid of giving a reasonable advice to other colleagues and consider the practice of hiding information as the alternative way to promote himself (herself) among others – the lowest mark will be assigned.

Hard discipline: This criteria assess general principals of professional ethics as officials appearance, style of cloth, work discipline and elementary personal ethics. The key concept here – to sustain image of a public servant as highly-professional and confident official the decision of whom bears no doubt.

Certainly, this procedure lacks many of those quality concepts discussed by the Working Group at the annual NISPAcee conferences. One may draw conclusion that the term “quality” in the minds of Ukrainian policy-makers are closely connected with judgment about the degree of how well public officials perform their duties defined in professional instructions and normative acts.. The logical question should rise: whether any further endeavors to quality management in Ukrainian public service should be followed by introducing gradually a quality standards and adjusting just described assessment procedure as the instrument to secure this quality, or, otherwise, may be it is worth to go short an authority in designing the dimension of quality concept towards intermediate providers of services. The last concept bears significant element of decentralization and contribute towards creativity and particular suitability (with respect to local characteristics) designed benchmarks. But, still many officials on the local level don’t want to “administer” to the community but do to “govern” and, following this context, any chance to set up a realistic, community needs tailored quality standards would fail.

Some local authorities approached this procedure in very informal way – only to make a report to the upper-level government. The main justification for this sounded in two ways: firstly, local authorities have no time to deal with not a useful additional “poetry” of central level, and, secondly, many authorities applied that the process of satisfying users of public services is a “black box” which can not be specified due to the complexity of psychological aspects exist in relations “people – public officials”. Thousands of functions are quite stochastic and usually follow a spontaneous character which can not be predetermined by some “set of public services” and assessed with some abstract criterias.

Also it raised a set of problems connected with the conflict of interest in the collective. As the main object of the annual assessment was the quality of work done (and not the professionalism of employee as attestation check ups), it was found that different levels of employees even with the same single department, try to achieve quite different personal purposes. This highlights the problem of lack of commitment of all team members towards designed goals achievement.

Meanwhile, in spite of stated above problems, the fact of giving attention to try to define and introduce in practice the concept of “quality of public services delivery” is the very important step towards adjusting national standards in public administration with those successfully operating in progressive countries. A number of practical propositions concerning this assessment procedure were submitted from the regional governments to central authority and one should expect a set of rational changes in this framework to make it more flexible, accurate and, the most important – effective for local communities to control the quality of public services they receipt.