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The self-assessment of quality culture and dimensions of social responsibility on the example of Pomeranian public organizations - winners of the Pomeranian Quality Award

1. Introduction

The concept of quality and quality culture has become a permanent part of the body of sciences, especially those related to quality management. The link between these two phenomena is obvious (Harvey, 2024; Jarrell & Kirby, 2024). Knowledge of quality, including its impact on organizational development has evolved over the years. The very definition of the concept of quality is gradually transforming with the development of civilization. The modern understanding of quality refers to the following universal definition as follows: "the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics of an object fulfills requirements" (ISO 9000, 2015). The different phases of development of the global economy determine a specific understanding of quality and adapt it to the needs of the times and the environment in which the organization operates (Wiśniewska & Grudowski, 2021).

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Quality culture is part of the overall organizational culture, and this, in turn, is the asset based on which the organizational identity is formed, from which successive generations of employees draw for the benefit of themselves and the entire enterprise. It is also a special strategic resource that enables an organization to build and maintain a long-term competitive advantage. This is due to the proper intentional formation of organizational culture, and thus the use of the unique characteristics and logic of an organization's collective actions to distinguish it from others. The current understanding of organizational culture is due to such authorities as Schein, Smircich, Bass, Morgan, Deal and Kennedy, Kliman or Peters and Waterman (Sułkowski & Sułkowska, 2014). Peters and Waterman (1982) emphasized that a strong and consistent culture is a necessary feature of any (excellent) enterprise without exception. Regardless of their position, by transparently defining the company's guiding values, everyone knows exactly what is expected of them. Organizational culture is a multifaceted concept. This is demonstrated by Schein. Organizational culture, according to Schein is defined as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration" (Schein, 2004, p. 17). According to the EFQM model (European Foundation for Quality Management), organizational culture is "the specific collection of values and norms that are shared by people and groups within an organization that influences, over time, the way they behave with each other and with key stakeholders outside the organization" (*The EFQM Model*, 2019, p. 13). However, each organization has different and specific subcultures with common features and individual characteristics that affect the overall organizational culture. They resemble connected vessels feeding this culture and may be a powerful inhibitor for seeking excellence in functioning (Mannion & Davies, 2018). One of them is quality culture, which can be defined as a set of values, traditions, procedures, and beliefs accepted by the members of an organization, creating an environment conducive to the formation and continuous improvement of quality (Gołębiowski, 2014). It can also be said that it will be a set of specific dimensions, or conditions, conducive to achieving the right level of quality. Greere and Riley (2024), citing a definition proposed by the EUA (European University Association) quote that quality culture is seen to be characterized "by two distinct elements: on the one hand, a cultural/psychological element of shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality, and, on the other hand, a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating individual efforts" which "are not to be considered separately".

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The rationale for undertaking research is that one does not see much domestic work on quality culture in public organizations, despite existing studies on the importance of quality culture (e.g. Haffer, 2005; Sułkowski, 2013; Pietruszka-Ortyl, 2018; Łopacińska-Mazurek, Tutko, 2021; Wiśniewska, Grudowski, 2021; Trela, 2023). This is confirmed by a search in scientific databases covered by the University of Gdansk repository, according to the keywords: "quality culture in public sector organizations", "quality culture in public organizations", "hospital quality culture", "quality culture in hospitals", "quality culture in offices", "quality culture in the office", "quality culture in school", "quality culture in higher education" (in Polish). Few in this regard (on public organizations in general) are the work written by Hawrysz and Hys (2011), or on universities presented by Wiśniewska and Grudowski (2020). The above confirms the existence of a research gap in this area of interest in Poland. Meanwhile, as far as foreign literature is concerned, the following number of entries connected with the culture of quality were identified: 69 records for public organizations in general; 213 records for hospitals; and 108 for higher education. For example, there are recent publications written on the need to develop a quality culture in universities (Do, Treve, 2024; AlTarawneh et al., 2024; Tu et al., 2024), in public hospitals (Alsmairat et al., 2024; Rosa et al., 2024), and generally, in public services delivery (Profiroiu & Hințea, 2024; Davis & Bodkin, 2024; Sa'adah et al., 2024). The choice of public organizations for the study stems from the fact that they play an important social role in every country, serving citizens and the broader public interest. The research problem undertaken in the study is the following question: What is the level of quality culture in public organizations participating in the competition for the Pomeranian Quality Award (PQA)? The purpose of the study is to identify the level of quality culture in selected public organizations and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the quality culture of these organizations. The auxiliary purpose is to recognize the level of involvement related to the social responsibility of these entities, assuming that this aspect is important in the overall perception of public organizations. In this paper, self-assessment, desk research, expert evaluation, and the method of synthesis and logical inference were used as research methods.

2. Literature and contextual background

According to Gołębiowski (2008), developing a culture of quality in an organization is not easy. It consists primarily of a cultural change of orientation from the removal of the effects of errors by quality control

services to an orientation of preventing the occurrence of errors with the involvement of all employees. The author adds that the formation of a quality culture also requires a change in the management model - from a traditional, highly hierarchical, and functional approach to one that takes into account the active attitude and responsibility of employees for the company's management process. In organizations with more advanced quality cultures, one observes a higher degree of organizational effectiveness, the use of management systems (Rehmani et al., 2020), quality methods, techniques, and tools (Khalfan et al., 2022), a strong emphasis on collecting, analysing and using data on stakeholder relations, including suppliers, employees, orientation toward organizational learning, a high degree of teamwork among employees (Shuaib & He, 2023), optimal use of human resources, and above all, recognition of quality as a management priority (Cameron, Sine, 1996). According to Hawrysz and Hys (2011), the culture of quality should be visible in the organizational mission, showing employees the need to care about quality. In addition, organizations with a culture of quality see positive trends in meeting customer expectations, an emphasis on systematically conducting risk analysis (Nygren-Landgärds et al., 2024), investing in modern equipment, and technology (Pratama et al., 2021), systematically conducting benchmarking, conducting ongoing self-evaluation regarding various areas of operation (Karim et al, 2022; Paraschivescu, 2020), supporting and rewarding employees (Tsai et al., 2020), encouraging employees and management to improve their skills systematically (Els et al., 2023), engaging employees to improve their jobs, emphasizing crew welfare (Lepeley, 2021), pro-environmental programs (Jum'a et al., 2023), pro-social programs (Minárová et al., 2021), as well as such initiatives as charitable or philanthropic activities. Organizations of this type are also often awarded and recognized by various bodies, such as business, industry, and other bodies (Molenda, 2012).

The importance of quality culture, and more broadly, organizational culture, is strongly emphasized in quality management models, manifested in such initiatives as competitions, European or national. The above means that in implementing these models, the right level of this culture must be formed parallelly to fit into the desired direction of organizational improvement. Regarding social relevance, public organizations and the level of services they provide play an important role. All the more so because their operation not only relies on social resources, including taxes but also impacts the well-being of citizens. In recent decades the public sector has been undergoing significant transformations in many countries. These include, in particular, the separation

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of management processes from politics, the disconnection of the role of the service recipient and service provider, the contracting of services, the adoption of customer orientation, increased accountability for results, and a change in organizational culture (Gadomska-Lila, 2016). In general, the public sector is the totality of entities of the national economy grouping state ownership (the State Treasury and state legal entities), ownership of local government units or local legal entities, and "mixed ownership" with the predominance of capital (property) of public sector entities (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, n.d.). As the researchers emphasize, to meet the emerging challenges public organizations must become more flexible, proactive, and, above all, results-oriented and efficient. To do so, a proper management system is necessary, which manifests itself, among other things, in different implementation models, methods, techniques, and tools previously developed for enterprises (Gadomska-Lila, 2016). Certainly, these models include models of excellence, understood as advanced approaches, based on the assumptions of comprehensive quality management, conducive to systematic improvement of the organization and meeting the needs of its stakeholders. The most important models of this kind include the Japanese Deming model, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) model, and the EFQM (European Foundation Quality Management) model, which are part of the quality awards phenomenon. They have their counterparts at the national level. According to current data, 39 countries and 3 regions have Business Excellence Awards programs, and 30 countries and 1 region have Business Excellence Initiatives programs, with the majority (30 programs) being awards based on the criteria of the EFQM model (Ghafoor & Mann, 2024). According to the established hierarchy and the necessary experience in applying for awards at the international and national levels, regional awards occupy an important place. At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, there were 15 competitions of this type in Poland based on the EFQM model. One of the most prominent is the competition held in the Pomeranian province, called the Pomeranian Quality Competition. The first edition of this competition was held in 1997 under the name of the Gdansk Quality Award, as part of the celebration of the Millennium of Gdansk. The originator and organizer was the Pomeranian Council of the Federation of Scientific and Technical Associations of the Supreme Technical Organization in Gdansk (then still under the name of the Provincial Council of the FSNT NOT in Gdansk), with the participation of the Pomeranian Chamber of Industry and Commerce and the Polish Register of Shipping (Biuletyn Informacyjny Pomorskiej Rady FSNT NOT w Gdańsku 2023). In 1998, the name of the

competition was changed to the Pomeranian Quality Award, which is still in force today (Wisniewska, Grudowski, 2021, pp. 101-102). The organizer of the competition is the Pomeranian Council of the Federation of Scientific and Technical Associations of the Supreme Technical Organization in Gdansk, while the partners of this initiative are: the Polish Register of Shipping, Pomeranian Business Club, Pomeranian Chamber of Crafts of Small and Medium Enterprises, and the Regional Chamber of Commerce of Pomerania (Biuletyn Informacyjny Pomorskiej Rady FSNT NOT w Gdańsku, 2024). The mission of the Competition for the Pomeranian Quality Award is "To engage Pomeranian leaders for continuous improvement of the organization, learning, creativity, innovation and following the spirit of sustainable development using the model of excellence of the Pomeranian Quality Award" (Biuletyn Informacyjny Pomorskiej Rady FSNT NOT w Gdańsku , 2024). The vision of the Competition is "A Europe in which Pomeranian organizations are leading the way, becoming a role model for other organizations in terms of quality and sustainability" (Biuletyn Informacyjny Pomorskiej Rady FSNT NOT w Gdańsku, 2024). This competition is very popular. This is evidenced by the fact that nearly 500 organizations have already taken part in it, and more than 200 have been awarded. In the year of the study, the structure of the excellence model used in the PQA consisted of nine main categories, as Leadership; Employees; Strategy and Planning; Strategy and Resources; Processes; Employees-Results; Customers and Citizens-Results; Social Responsibility-Results; and Performance Results.

Importantly, operating according to excellence models brings many benefits to organizations. For example, in 2011, the results of a study were published on the experiences of 69 organizations from five Asian countries (India, Japan, Singapore, China, and Thailand) that were winners of Business Excellence awards or only participants in competitions. According to the organizations' declarations, their performance has increased significantly from the conventional "industry average" to "above average" in such dimensions as leadership, strategic planning, customer focus, people management, process management, measurement, analysis, and knowledge management (Mann, 2011; Mann 2024c). The results of a survey of 22 Australian organizations are also available. A period of eight years (1991-1998) of application of the model was analysed. There was a direct relationship between participation in the awards program and annual improvements in financial performance. High-performing organizations were found to have the highest performance across a wide range of indicators, including financial performance and

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productivity. This is also manifested in measures of profitability. Each percentage point improvement in performance through participation in the Australian Business Excellence Award was associated with about a 2% increase in the annual average KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) used to assess the performance of operations. Organizations that entered the award more than once achieved an even more pronounced increase in KPI improvement (about 4%) than those that participated for the first time (Mann, 2024b). The research was also conducted in Dubai, where the award competition is part of a government program. The results confirmed that since the launch of the Dubai Government Excellence Program in 1993, the quality of services provided by the country's offices has steadily improved (Al Neaimi, 2020). For example, the United Arab Emirates' Government Efficiency Index, compiled by the World Bank Group, improved from 0.85 (and a global ranking of 41) in 2002 to 0.90 (and a global ranking of 42) in 2010 and 1.38 (and a global ranking of 24) in 2019. Similarly, positive changes were noted in the position in the Ease of Doing Business ranking (indicating the friendliness of a country's regulatory environment for starting and running a local business). Here, the index improved from 47th in 2008 to 33rd in 2011 and 16th in 2019 (Lesrado, 2017). The satisfaction of citizens using government services, as measured by the customer satisfaction index, has also improved. The index (consisting of data from customer surveys and mystery shoppers) shows an improvement from a value of 630 in 2004 to a value of 850 in 2018 (a 35% increase). This indicator is used in Dubai to select the best entity in the government services category (Mann, 2024a). Regular studies on the impact of applying the excellence model on the performance of an organization's operations are also conducted for the MBNQA award. In 2023, the National Institute of Standards and Technology in the United States, under whose aegis the competition for this award takes place, published a report showing that over the years the positive impact of applying the excellence model on the operational and financial performance of organizations can be confirmed (NIST, n.d.). The 124 MBNQA award winners were evaluated here (including 10 who won the award twice and two who won it three times). As for the two-time award winners, the median revenue growth rate in this case was 80%, while the median employment growth rate was 56%. As for the three-time award winners, these ratios are 255% and 188%, respectively.

An important place in the process of applying for each of these competitions, which also applies to the Pomeranian Quality Award, is played by self-evaluation. According to Klenovski (1995), self-evaluation is an assessment

or judgment of the values and functioning of an entity and the identification of its weaknesses and strengths, enabling it to improve its performance. It is a tool aimed at identifying areas for improvement and recognizing and maintaining good practices in an organization. It is considered a comprehensive and systematic review of an organization's activities and performance. Its purpose is to increase quality awareness, introduce quality improvement activities, and increase organizational performance (Brown & van der Wiele, 1996). With the above in mind, it can be pointed out that social responsibility is an element of quality. Next, developing a culture of quality supports the fulfilment of social responsibility requirements. This approach is presented by Milanović (2014), Shahin et al. (2007), Abbas (2020) and Vedernikova (2003).

3. Materials and methods

All public organizations participating in the Jubilee XXV edition of the Competition for the Pomeranian Quality Award, 2023, were evaluated. The selection of organizations was purposeful and thus convenient. The convenient selection, as Szreder (2010) points out, is based on the units that are easily accessible to the researcher and willing to cooperate. At the same time, it is relatively quick and inexpensive to implement. Thus, the investigator selects individuals for the sample, taking advantage of a convenient situation, which, in the context of the present work, turned out to be the trust, willingness, and organization's readiness to participate in the survey. Eight entities representing various sectors, located in Pomerania, applied. Self-assessment, desk research, and expert evaluation methods were chosen as the research method. Two original research tools were used - the first in the form of a self-assessment questionnaire, and the second, in the form of an expert evaluation questionnaire. Both questionnaires addressed the same issues of interest. The written self-assessment was carried out by authorized representatives of the organization, including directors, CEOs, and quality representatives. The expert evaluation was carried out by the author of the paper with the help of eight representatives of the competition chapter - three university professors, two representatives of the competition organizing entity (office director and project specialist), a representative of the Marshal's Office, a representative of the employers' organization in Pomerania and a representative of the certification body. The referenced evidence presented by the surveyed organizations was analysed, allowing verification of the

scores awarded. Together with the experts, the evidence included in the self-assessment sheet was reviewed and made complete. When determining the final level of compliance the score agreed upon by consensus reached by the experts was taken into account. For this work, the following definition of the level of quality culture was adopted: The degree to which an organization meets the highest level of compliance with the established dimensions of quality culture. The evaluation questionnaires consisted of three parts. The first, metric, identified the sector of operation and size of the organization. The second part of the questionnaire was developed based on the literature cited earlier. Hence, in the second part, the following dimensions were evaluated: K1 - Management systems implemented; K2 - Previous awards or distinctions within the framework of the Pomeranian Quality Award; K3 - Awards and distinctions won within the framework of other competitions; K4 - Charitable activities; K5 - Patents filed or improvements made on the job; K6 - Employee support programs; K7 - Investments undertaken; K8 - Participation in external projects for the benefit of society; K9 - Actions taken for environmental and climate protection. In this section, organizations were asked to describe in detail their efforts regarding the situation under study. These efforts were evaluated on a three-point scale, with 1 meaning "no evidence or scant evidence"; 2 - "there is partial evidence, poorly described"; 3 - "there is ample evidence and it is well described". The third part focused on assessing sixteen dimensions, dealing with issues such as: A1 - Meeting customer requirements; A2 - Improving the level of quality of services offered; A3 - Implemented supplier selection criteria; A4 - Modern equipment/equipment; A5 - Investing in employee development; A6 - Ways of communicating with employees; A7 - Cooperation and communication with suppliers; A8 - Using quality management methods; A9 - Using quality management tools; A10 - Conducting risk analysis; A11 - Conducting benchmarking; A12 - Conducting systematic performance appraisals; A13 - Upgrading skills by managers; A14 - Rewarding employees; A15 - Rationalization initiatives; A16 - Collaborating and sharing practical knowledge with students/students; Again, this series of questions was answered on the three-point scale already cited. In addition, depending on the specifics of the question in the third section, to make it easier to answer, a relevant question was included in each case, e.g. for A2 it read: "Over the past few years we have improved the level of quality of our services," the question read: "How do we know this? What indicators do we use to confirm this trend?"; for A9 reading "We use various quality management tools on an ongoing basis, e.g., Ishikawa diagram, Pareto

analysis, histograms, etc.", the question was: "What are these tools? In what area are they used? What purpose do they serve?" The final result consisted of adding up all the points connecting to the 25 dimensions to be evaluated and determining the final level of quality culture according to the formula: PKJ = $((\Sigma K_i + \Sigma A_i)/(n \times 3)) \times 100\%$, where n is the number of dimensions, and i - is a particular dimension. Within this construct, there were 6 dimensions subordinated to social responsibility issues: K4, K6, K8, K9, A7, and A16. The level of compliance, or SO, was calculated similarly.

For the interpretation of the results, the universal scale of relative states of quality of Kolman was used, who developed an interpretation standard, which uses, among other things, a scale of continuous values indicating states, from bad to excellent, with corresponding numerical class distinctions, symbolizing the degree of fulfilment of the given requirements, and in the case of this study - compliance with the highest state of a given dimension, evaluated on an absolute scale - from 1 to 3 (Kolman, 2009, p. 38).

4. Results and discussion

The survey included organizations representing the education sector, the healthcare sector, and the social economy sector. The general characteristics of the entities participating in the survey are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the studied organizations

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
Organization type	Higher education school	High school	Ho-spital	Ho-spital	Ho-spital	Ho-spital	Occu-pational medicine	Social cooperative
Number of employees	2857	129	845	3956	3854	1400	80	15
ISO 9001	xxxx*		x	x	x	x		x
ISO 14001			x	x	x	x	x	
ISO 27001			x	x	x		x	
ISO 45001		x	x	x	x	x	x	
ISO 17025	xxx*							

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								*
AQAP	x							
ISO 22000			x					
ISO 37001							x	
ISO 22301		x					x	

*number of certificates

As can be seen, the survey, and thus the competition, within the category of public entities, mostly involved institutions related to the healthcare sector, and large organizations predominated, nevertheless small and medium-sized entities were also included. All of them conduct their activities in the Pomeranian Voivodeship. The survey shows that all of these have participated at least twice in the PQA Competition with P4 participating for the fifth time. The above confirms that they are experienced organizations, familiar with the principles and rules of operation according to the adopted model of excellence. Each of these organizations has various certificates confirming management from a systems perspective. As can be seen from the quoted table, most of the organizations declare that they are certified to ISO 9001 (quality management system), ISO 14001 (environmental management system), ISO 45001 (occupational health and safety management system) or ISO 27001 (information security management system). Such a situation (although it concerns a modest number of entities) is part of a worldwide trend, confirming the high popularity of these systems and interest in them among organizations of various types (Burdak, 2021, pp. 656-666). It's also worth mentioning that P1 has four separate ISO 9001 certifications, which have been awarded to four different entities, such as technology centres or plants. In addition, the same entity, the university, holds certificates for ISO 17025 (requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories), awarded to several testing centers and plants. In addition, P1 holds an AQAP (Allied Quality Assurance Publication) certificate, awarded to a centre involved in defence, confirming compliance with NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) requirements for quality assurance in design, development, and production. These systems are gradually becoming more popular in Poland (Sujak-Cyryl, 2015; Popek, 2019, Pigłas et al., 2020), and due to their nature, many organizations integrate them with others, such as the information security management systems

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(Jagodzińska, 2023). One hospital facility is certified for compliance with ISO 22000 (food safety management system), which deals with processes related to patient nutrition. An interesting case is an occupational health facility, which, in addition to the most popular ones, has earned certifications for compliance with anti-corruption activities management systems (ISO 37001) and business continuity management (ISO 22301). The first system seems to be a very effective approach to fostering an anti-corruption culture in the organization, combined with the implementation of appropriate controls to detect bribery and reduce its occurrence (Stanciu, Tudoran, 2023). The second, requiring the implementation of a business continuity plan plays an important role in maintaining stability and the ability to execute processes in the event of a major disruption. It is implemented, among other things, by healthcare organizations such as hospitals, clinics, hospices, and wherever a given disruption can affect the disruption or interruption of operations (Haidzir et al., 2018). This is because the system is conducive to building a resilient organization (Galoutzi et al., 2021). Taking into account the documentation contained in the self-assessment survey questionnaire, after expert verification, the evaluation of areas K1 to K9 and A1 to A17 made it possible to determine the level of quality culture at each facility, as further presented in table 2.

**Table 2. Results of assessing the level of quality culture
in the surveyed public organizations**

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
K1	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2
K2	3	2	2	3	2	3	3	3
K3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3
K4	3	3	2	1	3	2	3	3
K5	3	3	1	3	1	1	3	1
K6	3	2	2	2	3	2	3	3
K7	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1
K8	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
K9	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	3

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A1	3	3	3	3	3	1	3	3
A2	3	3	2	2	2	2	3	3
A3	3	1	2	3	3	2	3	3
A4	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3
A5	3	3	2	2	3	2	3	3
A6	3	2	3	2	3	3	3	3
A7	3	1	2	1	3	2	3	3
A8	1	2	1	3	3	2	3	3
A9	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	3
A10	3	3	3	1	3	3	3	3
A11	3	3	3	2	3	1	3	2
A12	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3
A13	3	3	3	2	3	2	3	3
A14	3	3	3	2	3	1	3	2
A15	3	2	2	1	3	2	3	3
A16	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	2
Σ PKJ	73	64	61	59	71	57	73	67
PKJ (%)	97,3	85,3	81,3	78,7	94,7	76	97.3	89,3
Level	Excellent	Distinctive	Distinctive	Beneficial	Excellent	Beneficial	Excellent	Distinctive
Σ SO	18	15	14	13	18	15	18	17
SO (%)	100	83,3	77,7	72,2	100	83,3	100	94,4
Level	Excellent	Distinctive	Beneficial	Beneficial	Excellent	Distinctive	Excellent	Excellent

Source: own study

As for the level of quality culture, determined with the help of the dimensions established and adopted in the study, the analysis conducted allows us to observe

that the ratings obtained by the surveyed organizations are high, while the level is mainly excellent and outstanding, which applies to such entities as P1, P7, P5 and P8, P2 and P3, respectively. The weakest rating (76% compliance), but at a favourable level, was obtained by entity P6, i.e. one of the hospitals, which was influenced by the situation in dimensions K5, A1, A11, and A14, i.e., respectively, the lack of sufficient and convincing evidence of improvements on the job, of improvements in meeting the needs of patients, of conducting benchmarking activities, and regarding rewarding their employees for their achievements. For example, the demand for improvement in meeting patient expectations is part of the principle of continuous improvement and action for patient well-being. Measuring this satisfaction is crucial and allows necessary changes to be made at the hospital level and throughout the care system (Goodrich & Lazenby, 2023; Ali et al., 2024). It also makes it possible to compare the services provided in different facilities, across countries, for the benefit of the public (Amankwah et al., 2024), and this, in turn, fits in with the idea of external benchmarking, fostering improvements in standards of care (Bancsik et al., 2023). Undeniably, it is also crucial to adequately reward employees, appreciating their work, resulting, for example, in increased satisfaction (Tumat & Yousf, 2023) of staff and their better commitment (Liang, 2023).

A slightly better, but comparable score (78.7% compliance) also belongs to the hospital, with the dimensions considered the least fulfilled here: K4, or charitable activities; A7, cooperation and communication with suppliers; A10, lack of data on the conduct of risk analysis; and A15, or lack of evidence that any bottom-up improvements of a rationalizing nature are being implemented at the hospital. Meanwhile each of these elements has a significant impact on the operation and perception of hospital facilities. For example, Stecker et al. (2020) confirm that conducting charitable activities by medical facilities positively impacts its image. In addition, according to Mukundan et al. (2024), they play an effective role in ensuring equitable access to health care and fulfilling philanthropic duties as part of the idea of social responsibility. Sun et al. (2020) stress that effective supply chain management can provide hospitals with a new competitive advantage, adding that trust and commitment are important factors for a successful long-term supply chain relationship, provided it is created and sustained. Risk analysis is also not insignificant. It not only allows you to prepare for potential disruptions and disasters (Moradi et al., 2021), but above all, it is of great practical importance for improving the quality of health care and reducing medical errors (Liu et al., 2020). Researchers also point to bottom-up, ongoing improvements as a sign of attentiveness and concern for the common good

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of individual employees. These can include managers and the processes they implement (Bertillot, 2021), as well as, for example, activities of an operational nature, such as medication management (Religioni et al., 2022; Siahaan et al., 2023).

An important element of the evaluation was also to focus separately on the dimensions constituting the social responsibility of the participating entities. Also in this case the score is high, with a preponderance of excellent and outstanding. This high score was influenced primarily by the fact that each entity participates distinctively in various programs and projects, for the benefit of the local and regional community (dimension K8). Due to the current situation these include, for example, activities supporting the victims of the war in Ukraine (P1). Other examples include but are not limited to, a project to help students from villages and small towns (P2), a project on disease prevention, entitled. "In time for diabetes" (P3), a free program for comprehensive cardiac rehabilitation (P4), a project entitled. "Prevention of cerebrovascular disease" (P5), a project titled "Prevention of cerebrovascular disease" (P4), and a project titled "Prevention of cerebrovascular disease" (P5). "There are counsels for systems", in the field of cardiac rehabilitation (P6), lecture series, such as on bullying, stress at work, and safety at work (P7), or the campaign "Gdańsk without plastic". (P8). Diverse activities and approaches to collaborate and share practical knowledge with students/pupils were also rated positively (dimension A16). It was observed that many institutions collaborate and exchange knowledge with various groups of students, pupils, or other stakeholders seeking to gain knowledge in the field in which the entity specializes. It was noted that dedicated meetings, seminars, and training sessions are held at the establishments, and various field trips are made to share knowledge free of charge and to encourage people to take up work at a particular establishment. Such activity creates a platform for exchanging theoretical and practical knowledge and promotes the organization's activities. In this aspect, due to the number of initiatives undertaken and the nature and scope of activities, educational institutions and the institution representing occupational medicine come to the fore (P7). In most cases, there has also been a high degree of openness in providing data for students writing their undergraduate and master's theses and even doctorates. This kind of approach not only serves young people but also opens up a lot of opportunities for the facilities themselves, as confirmed by scientific research (e.g. Yepes, López, 2021). Such positive manifestations as building a culture of cooperation (Budur et al., 2024) or increasing employee creativity (Imamoglu et al., 2023) are highlighted.

Researchers also point out that cooperation of this kind contributes to building a society of the 5.0 era (Wahyudin et al., 2023).

5. Final remarks and conclusions

Operating according to models of excellence is a manifestation of a drive to increase one's capacity to meet the needs of various stakeholder groups. For this process to be successful, it is necessary to create the conditions defined as a culture of quality. A way to recognize whether this culture has been implemented and is being maintained in an organization is to measure and analyse the level of quality. This paper attempts to assess this phenomenon, using the author's methodology, created based on the literature on the subject. The research succeeded in identifying the level of quality culture and, within it, in assessing the degree of social commitment of the surveyed entities. Based on the results of the study, it can be noted that all the surveyed organizations were rated very highly, both in terms of the level of quality culture and their commitment in terms of social responsibility. In the first and second cases, according to the adopted scale according to R. Kolman, the prevailing rating is excellent and outstanding. The high rating in terms of overall quality culture is primarily influenced by:
- the visible participation of the surveyed entities in projects carried out for the general good, in closer and further surroundings, which further confirms their social responsibility,
- the fact of having several awards, confirming the quality of services provided and industry activity at a high level,
- the fact of having certified management systems, with a dominant share of compliance with standards: ISO 9001, ISO 14001, ISO 27001, and ISO 45001,
- modern equipment and infrastructure,
- conducting a systematic evaluation of its operation, which is conducive to ongoing monitoring of processes and services provided.

However, in some public organizations, there is a certain reluctance to report workplace improvements. They have not developed documented, effective means of communicating with their suppliers or subcontractors. The above can be considered as the weak aspects of their functioning, and additionally, the not-so-popular use of quality management methods. And taking into account the dimensions relating to social responsibility, here, too, at least favourable ratings prevail. The strength of the fulfilment of these dimensions is the aforementioned activity in undertaking projects for the benefit of society, followed by numerous

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environmental and climate protection initiatives in addition to the implemented ISO 14001 system. Significant seems to be the openness in sharing knowledge with different groups of stakeholders, especially young people.

Although the work provided interesting insights into the pro-quality and pro-social activities of the surveyed entities, it is not limited. The main limitation, even though this was a full sample, as far as public organizations are concerned, is the small number of subjects, which does not allow generalizations. A second limitation is the lack of studies of a similar nature, involving, for example, public organizations participating in other regional competitions. This, in turn, may also indicate the originality of this research. This is because, to the author's knowledge, these are the first studies regarding national quality competitions and the phenomenon of quality culture and corporate social responsibility. Hence, the primary implication for science is that the research gap in this area has been filled. Further research should include more public entities, such as those participating in the next editions of the Pomeranian Quality Award and other competitions. As the number of winners grows, the focus can be on entities in a specific sector, e.g. health care only. This approach will identify the sector's needs, at least at the regional level, and propose solutions, such as those of an educational nature. The practice implications is developing a useful self-assessment tool to track the overall and dimensions-oriented levels of quality culture and its social responsibility component. As for the social implications, they are related to the fact that the dimensions of the social responsibility of organizations are taken into account, including the impact of their activities on the society and natural environment in which they operate. The solutions used in these organizations can serve as good practices for implementation in other public entities, contributing to improving the quality of services for citizens.

Abstract

Purpose: The research problem is as follows: What is the level of quality culture in public organizations participating in the competition for the Pomeranian Quality Award? The purpose of the study is to identify the level of quality culture in selected public organizations and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the quality culture of these organizations. The auxiliary purpose is to recognize the level of involvement related to the social responsibility of these entities, assuming that this aspect is important in the overall perception of public organizations.

MAŁGORZATA ZDZISŁAWA WIŚNIEWSKA

Design/methodology/approach: A self-assessment, desk research, expert evaluation, and the method of synthesis and logical inference were used as research methods.

Findings: The surveyed organizations were rated very highly, both in terms of the level of quality culture and their commitment in terms of social responsibility. In the first and second cases, according to the adopted scale according to R. Kolman, the prevailing rating is excellent and outstanding. In both cases, the strength is the ongoing cooperation with the local and regional environment, functioning under management systems, and implementation of various programs for the natural environment and climate. The weaknesses of some organizations include reluctance to report workplace improvements and not documented, effective ways of communicating with their suppliers or subcontractors

Research limitations/implications: The main limitation is the small number of subjects, which does not allow generalizations. A second limitation is the lack of studies of a similar nature, involving, for example, public organizations participating in other regional competitions.

Practical implications: The development of a useful self-assessment tool to track the trend not only overall, regarding the level of quality culture and its social responsibility component, but also within individual dimensions

Social implications: The dimensions of the social responsibility of organizations are taken into account, including the impact of their activities on society and the natural environment in which they operate. The solutions used in these organizations can serve as good practices for implementation in other public entities, contributing to improving the quality of services for citizens.

Originality/value: This is the first research paper when it comes to national quality competitions and the phenomenon of quality culture and corporate social responsibility.

Keywords: *organizational culture, quality, social responsibility, excellence models, Pomeranian Quality Award.*

JEL code: H40.

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