

Total Quality Management and Public Administration: The case of Vila Real Town Hall*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Presently underlying the production of goods or services there is a big concern for quality. This is also an important issue for the client segment before accepting any of the many available offers.

The quality movement is based on a main idea: every good and service must have the maximum quality. To get to the bottom of this movement one has to understand in the first place the implications of its assumptions and how they reflect themselves upon the institutions (Connor, 1997).

In most countries, public administration is the economic sector which weights more heavily on employment and also the one which produces more goods and creates more services. Naturally one cannot remain indifferent to this Total Quality Management (TQM) movement in public administration. The Government is aware that "quality is now recognized and accepted worldwide as the client's satisfaction at an adequate cost and an imperative for all public organizations (...) in view of the public's and consumers' growing awareness of their rights." (DL n.º 166-A/99 de 13 de Maio).

In Portugal, public administration faces new and more complex challenges everyday as a result of economic, social and technologic changes the country is going through.

Thus it is the aim of the present paper to try and answer some questions, namely: how can the town hall of Vila Real cope with the TQM implementation in a context of change? Are there any obstacles or else favourable conditions to that implementation?

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2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Defining Total Quality Management

Everything that surrounds us asks for organizations to meet the needs of a specific clientele playing their role in a systemic way while facing management from a global point of view (Sanches, s/d).

Total Quality Management (TMQ) takes up again some main ideas from theories dating back from the beginning of the xx century, but its main concern though is to produce quality. Producing quality, however, is no longer a notion dealing exclusively with manufacturing goods or using techniques. It means now a management model. The check and statistic control oriented quality concept includes many functions such as: continuous improvement, infallibility, participated management, continuous training, human resources development, giving or delegating authority, and, especially providing leadership, motivation and commitment together with a strategic vision based on planning and management processes meant to meet the clients' expectations (Schmidt e Finnigan in Moreira, 2000).

Implementing quality management begins with fully grasping its meaning. The quality concept revolves around the notions of conformity, adequacy and the client's satisfaction. One way of addressing the issue is to think systemically, through the interaction of three variables: product, client and use. It is from the dynamics of this interaction that the idea of quality ensues. Consequently, quality is much more than just a few strategies or statistic techniques. Above all it is a matter of deciding, which reflects itself on organization working policies. Its benefits are consistent, long lasting and permanent.

Becker (1993 in Moreira, 2000) defines total quality management as a people oriented administrative system with the purpose of permanently increasing the customer's satisfaction at diminishing real costs. Total quality is a systemic approach departing from a high level strategy which works horizontally by means of functions and departments. It involves the workers, suppliers and customers and favours learning and the will to adapt to changes as an important factor leading to organizational success.

Noel (1995 *in* Connor, 1997) seems to share these views about TQM in the sense that he finds it an attempt to rediscover the consumer. Decisions at any level are dictated by consumers' needs and wishes so that quality must be defined accordingly.

We may then conclude that TQM is one of the main goals of any organization and it can be reached through setting up long term global policies oriented towards the consumer involving every single person and requiring a 100% commitment on the part of the organization itself.

2.2 Total Quality Management and Public Sector

In the eighties the idea of total quality management became rather popular in the United States as a result of American industry trying to assert itself in the global market. After a decade had elapsed, some governments began to realize the importance of quality management as a means to provide acceptable services. During the nineties, because of reduced budgets and the citizens' growing demand for services, governments speeded up the whole process so that every state and local government might adopt quality management as the miraculous solution for many of their problems (Rosenhoover and Kuhn, 1996). For decades, says Bilhim, in mainland Europe, influenced by their own model of public administration, the big public sector organizations favoured only efficiency which meant carrying out administrative procedures the right way (, 2000:287). All these changes brought about the redefinition of public administration values replacing them by the customer primacy.

Swiss (1992 *in* Rosenhoover and Kuhn, 1996) refers, too, that despite the public's growing interest in quality management many critics still find quality management techniques used by the private sector unsuitable for the public sector. Rosenhoover and Kuhn (1996) believe the main differences between private and public total quality management lie in their maturity and acceptability levels.

TQM was first used in industry so that the product quality could be improved. It is not surprising then, that some doubts as to its application to services may arise (Swiss, 1992 *in* Rosenhoover and Kuhn, 1996). Deming answers to these criticisms in his book *Out of the Crisis* in a chapter dedicated to service organizations. According to him, costs supported by customers who are provided with a "poor service" may be as damaging as buying bad products. Knowledge about measuring costs and poor services quantifying quality improvement, especially in public services may prove itself worth the effort though not always easy.

That is why, Keeley (1992 in West et al, 1993) refers TQM as a set of principles, tools and management processes to improve, modernize and render public service quality more effective. TQM is then a productivity improvement strategy whose main feature is the compromise with consumers' needs. More and more people claim their rights; they want to have their problems solved as rapidly and with as little costs as possible. Bilhim (2000) subscribes to the idea, adding that citizens' awareness as well as their level of upbringing and citizenship poses new challenges to public administration.

According to Galloway (1992 in West et al, 1993) there are many ways of applying TQM to public administration, including police departments, firefighter departments, personnel management, transports, public services among others. Sensenbrenner (1991 in Berman e West, 1995), refers the governments' interest in TQM translated into an increase of TQM initiatives in areas such as road maintenance, welfare, police protection and emergency services.

Galloway concludes that local administration may come to find TQM very attractive in the sense that it helps understanding what a community needs, as well as making public administration contain costs and improve services. Local administration may benefit from TQM insofar as it may become a means to increase responsibilities, diminish revenues and the public's cynicism regarding civil servants' skills (Sensenbrenner, 1991 in West et al, 1993).

TQM applications are multiple and varied, from reducing costs in public administration to reorientation strategies intended to meet as effectively as possible with the public's needs. They are usually designed to raise the consumer's orientation, and as cost reducers to control the duration and performance of the services. In Berman's and West's opinion (1995), however, many of these applications do not comply with TQM tenets.

Stupack and Garrity (1993 in McGowan, 1995) noticed that of all the changes the public administration had undergone, there were some particular aspects that created the opportunity to implement TQM. And the first one had to do with improving the process. In the past, the public sector was not exactly interested in providing effective services. With the present increase of competition and the offer of reliable alternative services it felt the need to review its position. Moreover, the public administration was forced to pay attention to effectiveness and efficiency in order to be able to deal with economic problems.

Secondly, quality began to be defined by consumers who, according to the public administration may be divided into two external groups: the public in general and groups of interests.

The third change refers to the fact that the civil servant now has the power to make decisions, according to the principle that the worker is more likely to do things well if he/she follows clear instructions. Governmental complexity points to the need of decentralizing so that civil servants respond more aptly to environmental changes.

Then the author refers that decisions are based on facts, since external assessment and alternative sources motivate public administration to develop a decision making rational measure other than only lowering costs.

Finally, there is a likely long term compromise, which must be top down if there is to be a really successful TQM implementation in public administration.

Stupak and Garrity (1993 *in* McGowan, 1995) concluded TQM may be implemented both in the private and in the public sector; however, it calls for different implementation strategies in order to deal with different context realities where developing certain measures may prove to be no easy task.

2.3 The Challenges of Implementing TQM in Public Administration

A diagnosis of the public organization using appropriate tools will assist it in appraising its current conditions, identifying the nature of the forces which may back up as well as restrain its efforts, and in building its appropriate strategy. It should be pointed out that Deming's 14 points alone are not all that public administration needs; each public organization should set up a strategy capable of answering to their unique needs (Radine Coffee, 1993).

For many organizations TQM implementation entails a certain change. It may have an impact on culture, leadership, the structure of the organization as well as of the processes, and, in many cases, on all these aspects at the same time. This point deals with the principles bearing on the challenges of implementing TQM.

2.3.1. Organizational Change

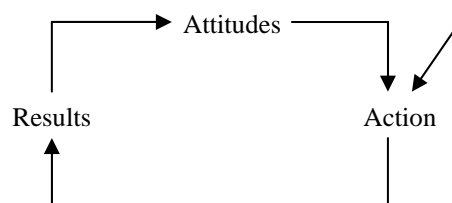
According to Lewin (*in* Ehrenberg e Stupark, 1994) implementing TQM means undergoing a profound organizational change. He suggests that when two opposite forces – one urging to introduce the change and another striving to keep the *status quo* – are equally strong it is possible to speak of a "quasi equilibrium" which will only be disrupted if the former becomes stronger than the latter.

As Lewin (*in* Ehrenberg e Stupark, 1994) sees it, change is a three step process during which one has to:

- a) Reduce the forces by providing information which shows the difference between actual and ideal behaviour;
- b) Induce new behaviours, values and attitudes through changes in the structure and in the process
- c) Enhance a new state of equilibrium by reinforcing values, norms and the organizational culture

Ehrenberg and Stupark (1994) claim the organizational culture is inevitable. When TQM is implemented, public organizations must be able to grasp the process of change for TQM philosophy means continuously improving the management process. Thus (Berry: 1990) it is possible to influence attitudes and naturally to obtain better results by getting individuals to do things differently.

Therefore, understanding the cultural environment is vital to TQM implementation and by extension to the success of the prospective change. Figure 1 represents the level of intervention required for the intended change.



Source: Berry (1990:30)

Fig- 1: Cycle of Change

2.3.2 Organizational Culture

Any organizational culture naturally reacts to the impact of change and TQM and in order to anticipate the latter it is necessary to understand the former.

Schein (1985 *in* Ehrenberg e Stupark, 1994) defines culture as the collective knowledge shared by a given group when developing its capacity to survive in an outside environment and to manage its internal affairs. Culture appears as the solution for both the working group's internal and external problems and is regarded by new members as a correct way to understand think, and feel them. These solutions have gradually become assumptions regarding reality, truth, time, space, human nature, human activity and human relationships and, after a while they became sort of guaranteed and lacking any sign of consciousness (Schein *in* Ehrenberg e Stupark, 1994). This is how culture operates.

A long term TQM based change of the organizational culture must not ignore its tolerated elements; it should, therefore, include important values and basic assumptions.

An important feature in any culture is the individual's or group's willingness to change. Wilkins and Patterson (1985 *in* Ehrenberg and Stupark, 1994) suggest that cultural change must reflect shared assumptions on equity (the truth among members), competence (how the individuals' skills contribute to the organization), and adaptation to change (the organization structure control).

These authors insist on the need to understand public administration resistance to deviate from traditional ways of doing things and adopting new behaviours before attempting the change.

2.3.3 Organizational Structure

The organization structure and its activity processing model are key elements to reach objectives and results in a TQM context. This structure should complement culture and take the processes into consideration, developing measures to guarantee the consumers' satisfaction and to provide correct decisions based on data and facts.

According to Brown *et al* (1994), organizations pass on the responsibility to manage TQM implementation to a hierarchy consisting of "committees" and teams.

Integration is the key to a successful change. When TQM is firmly embedded in the organization's operating procedures quality becomes one among the many working units and

teams. Nevertheless, quality performance depends on the responsibilities of each organization.

2.3.4 Leadership

Leadership is an important stimulus leading to change as well as a key element within the organization's culture and structure. As Brown et al (1994) put it, the leader plays a fundamental role in consolidating TQM and is especially critical in showing his/her commitment.

Likewise, Hersey and Blanchard (1988 in Ehrenberg and Stupark, 1994) define leadership as the influence needed to reach certain goals and propose a leader based leadership model. The more effective a leadership is the more it shows a great concern about promoting dialogue, participation, and delegation. TQM involves people evenly encouraging them first to participate in a plan and then to act on their own.

Brown et al (1994) corroborate the thesis that in order to implement TQM successfully the leader should develop a strategy compatible with the employees' style. These will work harder to implement quality proactively instead of separately.

According to West *et al* (1993) if TQM implementation is to be successful, leadership must be up to the challenges. It must also be regarded as an organizational phenomenon consisting of a set of strategies used by the leaders to implement TQM. The leaders' tasks may be described as transformational, transactional and representative (West et al, 1993; Ehrenberg e Stupark, 1994).

a) Transformational Leadership

Schon (1971 in Ehrenberg e Stupark, 1994) refers that the first and perhaps most complex task of a leader is to draw the problem. The process of knowing what to define, what decisions to make, what goals to achieve, by what means is based on problematic situations which are always uncertain.

A leader must bear in mind the mission and the strategy, the organizational culture and the human resource management. When designing a new vision, a leader should line up culture with the organizational structure and encourage subcultures which meet the organization's goals. The manager uses the system and the human resource management

(education and training programs, reward and promotion systems) to shape culture in such a way as to guarantee that TQM implementation obeys and is strongly committed to the organization's objectives.

Burs (1978 in Ehrenberg and Stupark, 1994) makes a distinction between transformational leaders who "exchange things" (usually work for votes) and another type of transformational leader who also exchange things but in a constructive way, that is, understanding and meeting with individual needs. This kind of transformational approach is consistent with the TQM philosophy. Berman and West (1995) emphasize the role of the transformational leader as someone who turns renewal into something accepted rather than rejected.

Grady (1992 in West *et al*, 1993) has enounced some of the most important TQM transformational tasks: to spread in the whole of the public organization the notion of a commitment to the consumer; to ensure rewards leading to identifying consumers' needs; to train and help civil servants and managers in setting responsibilities and using new techniques to measure performances and study problems; to increase coordination among units; and to stimulate a continuous improvement of all the areas already mentioned.

b) Transactional Leadership

In order to be effective transformational strategies must be accompanied by transactional ones. The latter make sure that TQM methods and principles are accepted both by civil servants and other public agents (Berman and West, 1995).

West *et al* (1993) describe this type of leadership either in terms of willingness (accommodation, promises of future benefits...) or coerciveness (manipulation, threats...). In view of these objectives, transactional leaders work to make sure that TQM methods, strategies and principles are adopted by the organizations. The main idea underlying this leadership is that it is anchored in expectancy theories since accepting the change is a communication process negotiated between top management and the civil servants (Badarocco and Ellsworth, 1989 in West *et al*, 1993).

The most commonly used leadership transactional strategies are:

- a) Top down planning;
- b) Average level team implementation;

c) Supporting initiatives leading to speeding up services (West *et al*, 1993)

The first strategy is not highly recommended for changing organizational culture. The second is the most commonly used and creates an effort towards obtaining success in implementing TQM. It is transactionally important because it involves civil servants, top managers and, sometimes, medium managers. The top manager allows employees and medium managers to implement strategies so that the organization is not threatened in any way. The last one brings about little changes; therefore it is often used together with the average team implementation strategy.

In order to overcome employees' resistance to changing certain measures should be consistently applied like performance measures, monitoring personnel satisfaction, acknowledging objectives, promoting the workers' development and rewarding (Berman and West, 1995). Examples of performance measures are the number of units using TQM, the cost saving/reduction, the quantifiable increase in employment and customer's satisfaction. It is important to monitor the personnel's performance for it provides information as to whom and what lies at the bottom of their worries.

c) Representative Leadership

Representative leadership is the process of justifying results, aims, and processes as well as gaining the approval of the organization stakeholders. It implies a substantial educational effort and dealing with political obstacles. Berman and West (1995) claim that it helps making external *stakeholders*, like politicians and community groups accept the advantages of TQM. Without their acceptance the initiatives to attain quality may be affected and innovations like TQM will not last long.

According to West *et al* (1993) this kind of leadership can be critical in terms of TQM implementation for it helps reduce time costs, minimizes the resistance to change among senior managers used to traditional systems, reduces intermediate staff members' apprehension by rewarding them and meeting with their expectations, and provides financial support to TQM initial efforts..

Examples of this kind of leadership are the community's suggestions which are often used as a means of minimizing problems and learning from the external environment.

2.4 Difficulties in implementing TQM in Public Administration

When a TQM program fails the reasons for its failure are often ascribed to everyone but the executive staff. Sometimes it is so, but more often than not it begins with the executive staff not getting really committed to it (Brown *et al*, 1994). However, there are many other reasons why TQM fails.

West *et al* (1993) call the attention to the fact that TQM is not faultless. One of its main shortcomings is that it is potentially anti-democratic since it focus on the consumer- the one who can pay for the goods wanted – and not the public in general. Frederickson (1992 *in* West *et al*, 1993) defends that public agencies should be responsible for the constituents' needs. This is particularly relevant in areas such as motor way tolls, parole policies, solid waste management, in relation to which consumers' and constituents' interests frequently diverge. Another concern has to do with the possibility of TQM forcing uniformity upon public services. The notion that public services may act mechanically in relation to individual consumers' needs is also referred by Jonhston (1993 *in* West *et al*, 1993) who states that different forms of behaviour must be adopted according to the people in question so that their needs are fully provided for. We may conclude that TQM applied to public services must tackle people's needs individually to ensure they are satisfied.

According to Berman's and West's study (1995) there are many other impediments to TQM implementation such as the traditional administrative functions, the need for a long term commitment harmed by changes in the political context, the difficulty in transposing experiences from the private into the public sector, and sometimes the misunderstanding of the real aims of implementing TQM in public administration. Berman and West have noticed that many organizations implement TQM innovations at a certain level rather than carry out a total commitment with success.

Bowen and Greiner (1991 *in* Berman e West, 1995) too, believe TQM implementation requires a certain commitment with training and adequate rewards, without which TQM is not feasible. These authors refer in the same study that the need for training on the part of managers and employees cannot be underestimated. And, of course, we cannot ignore the fact that TQM implementation takes a long time to reflect itself upon the salaries due to financial constraints and the need for resources.

Radin and Coffee (1993) consider the presence of multiple conflicts and lobbies inside a public organization to be one of the main problems regarding TQM implementation. The dominant group usually creates problems which make it difficult to stabilize relationships. It becomes hostile and seizes the time for changing as its opportunity to strike.

For McGowan (1995) there are many lessons to learn from these difficulties. The first is that quite often TQM fails because it is not understood or it is misused or both. Organizations must be aware that TQM means changing management procedures on a systematic basis, including redesigning organizational and operating structures, redefining management roles, learning know-how on the part of employees and orienting organizational objectives.

The second is that TQM cannot be a “patchwork” of management structures and systems due to its conventional techniques. For the change to be beneficial, the whole of the organization will have to change and not just a small part of it. Public organizations must be seriously and totally committed to TQM so that their management procedures and philosophy can be really changed for the better. This is also the only way to avoid discrepancies between aims and procedures resulting from the decision making process and control functions.

Finally, McGowan considers that in an organization “subject” to the TQM philosophy the workers can coordinate their activities free from organizational impediments. The public organization should consist of a chain of connected processes whose end link is the consumer in need of a continuous integration, which includes sharing information and collaborating. The way TQM is regarded varies considerably, namely in what concerns possible results and how to achieve them. Some civil servants may be willing to develop their team work and interpersonal skills more effectively but they usually resist quantitative development and analytic tasks.

3. CASE STUDY

3.1 Empirical Study Aims and Methodologies

Adapting the productive system of goods and services to government policies’ social and economic goals needs is something that requires quality as an instrument. Bilhim (2000:191) believes that nowadays, people would be only too reluctant to accept an authoritarian, arrogant administration divorced from social problems; instead, they would

demand that public administration be the engine of the country's social, cultural, and economic development, providing quality services rather than a hindrance.

The Portuguese government has been improving the quality of local public services through administrative modernization protocols with city and town halls under Resolution 23/94 March 17 within the technical and financial cooperation between central and local administrations (Resolução do Conselho de Ministros, n.º 108/2001).

With this study its authors wish to convey the notion of how the municipality of Vila Real¹ can benefit from implementing TQM. In this section we intend to address the important role played by both an organizational culture and its environment and management procedures upon the normal functioning of an institution -Vila Real town hall- in terms of improving its service quality. Namely we wanted to check whether there were favourable conditions for launching a quality program at various levels, e.g.: a consistent willingness on the part of all employees to set forth a program based on their participation; readiness or resistance to embark on a participation process which changes the usual rules of power in local municipalities; resistance or support to a program depending on a culture favourable to team work.

In order to carry out this project we used the case study methodology. To be more precise, in July 2002 we took 50 questionnaires to the town hall of Vila Real² to be fulfilled afterwards by a representative sample of the employees in the various departments. The questionnaire fulfilment rate was 82%.

3.2 Comments on the inquest results

The questionnaires were distributed in every department aiming at clarifying the aspects of the institution's culture, environment, and functioning. Of the fifty questionnaires

¹ Characterization of Vila Real Population

Population	Area	Population Density	Active Population	Primary Sector (% Pop. Activa)	Secondary Sector (% Pop. Activa)	Tertiary Sector (% Pop. Activa)	Unemployment Rate
49 957	378,5 Km ²	132 hab/Km ²	44,5%	6,5%	22,5%	70,9%	7,8%

Source: INE (National Statistic Institute) (2002)

² Vila Real Town Hall (CMVR) has about 325 workers, although half of them are external workers, that is, they are not full time workers. Thus we think the sample is representative. Further information regarding Vila Real town hall

	Total Expenses in 10 ³ Euros	
	Non-capitals	Capital
2000	8535	11260
2001	9418	22995

Source: NSI (2002, 2003)

delivered, we got forty two back; the remaining eight were returned or they were not fulfilled in time to be used in our study. Considering the fact that many workers were on holiday in July, the number of answers to the questionnaire is considered significant.

The results are presented by thematic sets. Each set contains both statistic and descriptive and interpretative information. The thematic sets were assessed through the various questionnaire sections. Whenever it was relevant and for the sake of clarifying the message the results were presented in a graphic.

3.2.1 Service Functioning

Most of the employees who answered the questionnaires (66%) answered affirmatively as to there being a competent receptionist in the institution's hall giving some assistance either in terms of information or showing people where the services are. 34%, however, answered negatively. It is not possible to speak of public service quality especially in those services with a higher affluence of public if there is no such receptionist.

Almost everybody answered negatively to the question whether there was a service placed where everybody could see it. Only one clerk answered affirmatively and another did not answer at all probably because he was not aware of its existence. This is certainly a measure very easy to implement and one that will help those who need to use the services of public administration.

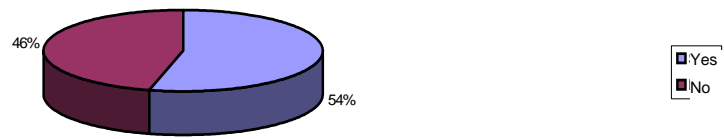
As to there being a panel containing information about the places where to go to handle the business in hand the number of negative answers was even higher reaching 97.5%. There was no affirmative answer.

In the fourth question the results were a little better than in the previous ones. 39% of the respondents mentioned the existence of a timetable and of a list with service phone numbers. Almost 60%, however, deny having ever heard of it.

3.2.2 Working Atmosphere

A good working atmosphere shows just how important it is for the institutions' good functioning to have a healthy relationship between senior staff and clerks. In Vila Real town hall over 50% of the respondents answered affirmatively. Nevertheless, there is a high percentage of clerks who are not satisfied with the working atmosphere.

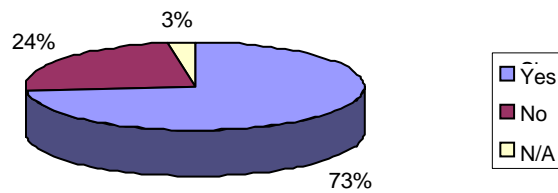
Graphic 1: A good working atmosphere



Source: Own gathered data

Regardless of the results obtained in the previous question the institution provides its clerks with good working conditions.

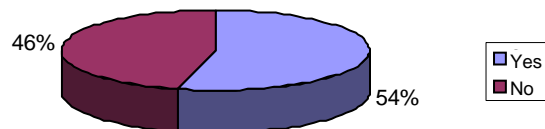
Graphic 2: Good working conditions



Source: Own gathered data

Regarding communication, the majority refers being listened to. 46% of the workers, however, complained about there not always being a feedback between senior staff and clerks.

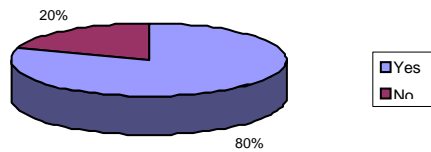
Graphic 3: Good feedback



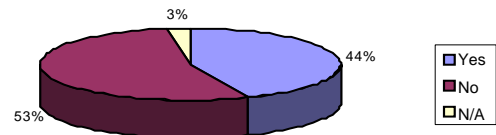
Source: own gathered data

When questioned about expressing their views on problems inside the institution, the clerks seemed quite at ease to discuss them with their superiors, as shown in the following graphic

Graphic 4: Expressing their opinions to their superiors



Graphic 5: Questioning their superiors

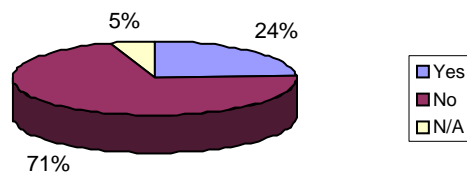


Source: own gathered data

In spite of it, we have noticed that half of the clerks do not approach their superiors in order to know how tasks and functions, develop meaning that either they do not care or got too much used to the daily routine so damaging to the quality system implementation.

The following graphic reflects the above mentioned conclusions: 71% of the respondents share the opinion that there is no such thing as a good information service within the institution mostly due to the relation ship between clerks and their superiors.

Graphic 6: Good information system

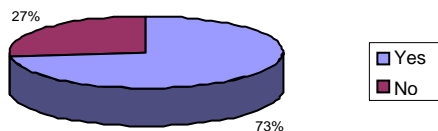


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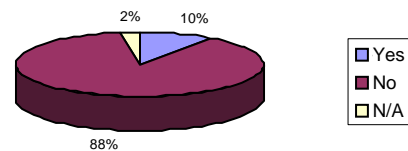
3.2.3 The workers' view

Most civil servants relate the organization success with their own personal success which is a positive factor for improving the service quality. But there are still a considerable number of respondents (27%) for whom personal success has little or nothing to do with the institution for which they work.

Graphic 7: The institution's success as a personal success factor



Graphic 8: Worker motivation policy



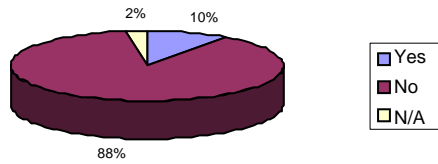
Source: Own gathered data

In what concerns developing a worker motivation/satisfaction policy, we come across one of the public administration main features: there is no adequate policy designed to reward workers' efficiency and productivity. Only 10% of the respondents answered affirmatively to this question.

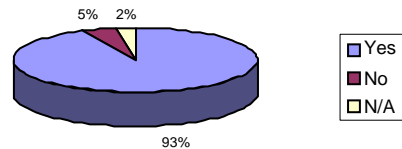
The next question, about the existence or not of a human resource policy is closely linked with the previous one; therefore, the results were not surprising. In fact, an organization which does not motivate or reward its workers cannot be said to have a rational and efficient human resource management.

That is also clear in the answers to the question regarding the importance of an incentive system which also encourages workers to make suggestions: 92.5% of the respondents answered affirmatively

Graphic 9: Human resource policy



Graphic 10: The importance of there being a worker suggestion incentive system



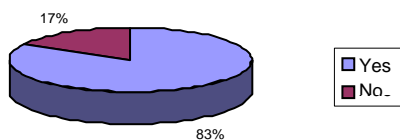
Source: Own gathered data

3.2.4 Professional training

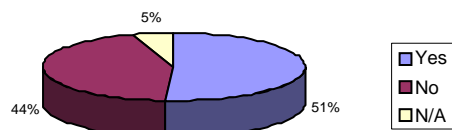
Most workers agree to receiving professional training as a means to increase profitability. Only a small percentage (17%) considers it does not help improving one’s performance.

Despite these results we noticed that only 44% of the respondents had got some training the previous year. Accounting, computing and housing were the most attended courses with an attendance rate of 20%, 13% and 13%, respectively. The remaining 54% refer to other courses such as: notary registers, municipal management, cultural heritage, GIS (Geographic Information Services) and urbanism.

Graphic 11: Training/Profitability increase



Graphic 12: Getting professional training

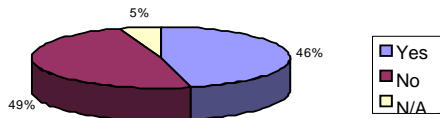


Source: Own gathered data

3.2.5 Culture and Principles

The influence of cultural factors on management is the result of the more or less general notion that they make the difference between a successful institution and another that is not so. Cultural factors tend to be regarded as potentially helping solving problems and adapting to changes or, on the contrary, making it more difficult.

Graphic 13: Organizational culture



Graphic 14: Identification with the organizational culture



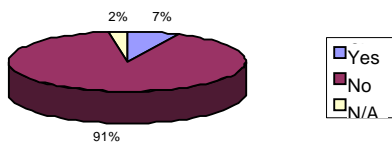
Source: Own gathered data

Individualism puts together values shifting between preserving individual or group interests. The municipality workers' individualistic mentality is contrary to the interdepartmental cooperation which is more and more required from public services.

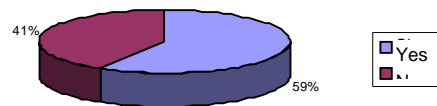
3.2.6 The Image and the Relationship with the clients

All the respondents referred their concern for the image the institution presents to the outside public. This is extremely important in terms of the quality system implementation objectives.

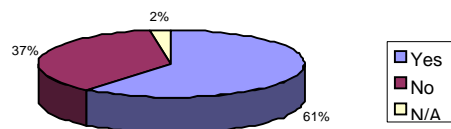
Graphic 15: Identification of client's needs



Graphic 16: Forms available for suggestions and complaints



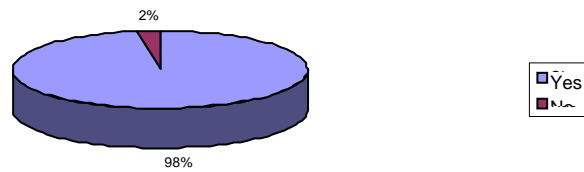
Graphic 17: Answers to client's complaints



Source: own gathered data

Public administration quality is also about creating a feedback between institutions and the citizens they serve. Users’ suggestions and complaints may be a valuable contribution for a more effective communication between municipalities and the citizens. 61% of the town hall clerks have stated that the services respond to the clients’ communications. There is a high percentage of negative answers though.

Graphic 18: Communication as a strategic factor

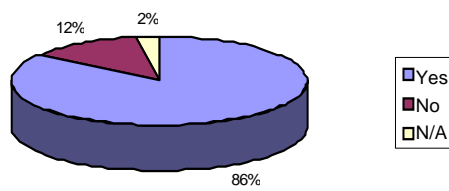


Source: Own collected data

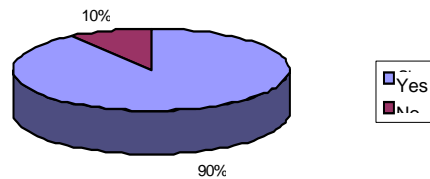
3.2.7 Communication

From the number of affirmative answers to whether the communication in the municipality is clear and simple it is possible to conclude that it is done objectively and does not generate ambiguities or misunderstandings.

Graphic 19: Clear communications



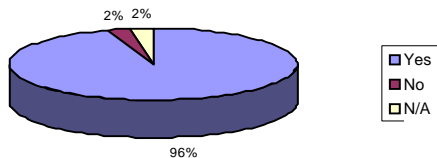
Graphic 20: Simple language



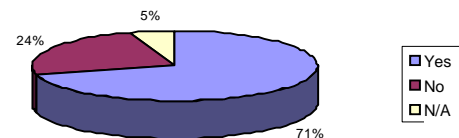
Source: Own gathered data

Results regarding identifying both the institution and the clerks in communication supports are encouraging. They reflect transparency rules applied to services translated into the citizens' easier access to the various administration departments.

Graphic 21: Institution identification



Graphic 22: Clerk identification



Source: Own gathered data

4. CONCLUSION

Public Administration strategy to continuously improve its services should be a “consumer – service management” consisting of processable objectives and an organizational perspective meeting with the consumers' expectations: “The right thing right the first time” (Wagenheim and Reurnink, 91 *in* Ehrenberg e Stupak, 1994).

So that public administration embraces TQM a number of assumptions must be fought.

1. TQM is never a government priority: to improve service quality is hardly a national priority.
2. TQM is not part of public culture.
3. The threat of loss of authority and power in the team process.

According to Shoop (1991 *in* Ehrenberg and Stupak, 1994) public organizations are seldom afraid of losing customers or consumers. Incentives for increasing quality and improving consumers' satisfaction are usually wasted on them. Top managers and intermediate staff prefer security and if they feel threatened it is not likely they will adhere to TQM philosophy.

In the last couple of years, however, Portuguese Public Administration has shown signs of wishing to change. Presently to try and make Portuguese Public Administration more overt and equipped is setting the path to a citizen oriented public service culture. In the various public organizations leaders will find many competences, responsibilities and opportunities that only perseverance will make possible to overcome.

We have tried to see how it is vital for any Administration to be able to count on a solid, dynamic and cohesive working team free from the excessive weight of hierarchical leaders. To ignore this may be to condemn the organization to failure. It is necessary to dialogue with the workers, to delegate tasks, to communicate effectively in order to gain the trust of the various teams.

In the specific case of Vila Real town hall, and according to the results of the empirical study, there is still a long way to go in what concerns dialogue, information, and communication. Top down communication should also be encouraged for if we are to have quality services the information must circulate and clerks must be able to communicate with their superiors. Another aspect to be developed is the personal contact practice in the sense that it improves the services to the clients. Once again the leader plays a crucial role in establishing a relationship between the client and the technician which will help know the formers' needs better.

Finally, there is no organizational culture in the municipality of Vila Real. Yet, it is an important feature which distinguishes a successful institution. If the clerks do not fully grasp the organization culture it will be very difficult to improve quality service in Vila Real town hall.

We are convinced that this municipality has enough, relatively important features which call for the implementation of a quality management system. In what concerns favourable conditions to create such a program, it is our belief that there is still a long way to go. Although there is an apparent willingness on the part of all the clerks to adopt TQM philosophy, a strong resistance is also to be expected since it would mean changing the usual rules, having clerks and their superiors participating in the project and, above all, identifying and recognizing an organizational culture which still does not exist. We think the solution for this involves Participation rather than Hierarchy; Cooperation rather than Independence. It is necessary to favour the spirit of renewal, defending values such as effectiveness, efficiency,

and quality; above all it is imperious to assume an “irreversible commitment to quality in a continuous and gradual renewal process” (Government Resolution no 108/2001).

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