



Quality of Social Services in Europe

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Introduction

Social Services are the subject of an intensive demand for quality and effectiveness (European Commission, 2006). All the European Member States have embarked upon a so-called process of modernisation of their social services. The common challenge in this process is to tackle the tensions between universality, quality and financial sustainability (European Commission, 2006).

In many member states of the European Union, social services are currently undergoing transformation as a consequence of political, economic and social redirection. As result of the modernisation of the social sector (European Commission, 2006), the social service sector is developing into a more open and competitive market. This will have consequences for the quality approaches that will be applied:

- Quality approaches should facilitate a process on self-evaluation on performance against criteria
- Quality approaches should also encourage the quality development with service providers
- Certification of quality and accreditation of services could be used to assure the quality of the service provider and eliminate bad services in the market.

A major pre-condition for quality of social sector is access to these services, which means that the services are affordable, available, and accessible. (High Level Group on Disability, 2007) Therefore quality of services should be a question combining choice of the individual user, availability and affordability of services with some basic quality guarantees.

At European level there is no mandatory standard for Social Services but the current developments in the social sector ask for a European approach and a common framework for quality in the disability related sector. The European Commission set out its vision on quality by identifying objectives and principles of organization of social services in particular, the importance of users' and stakeholders' involvement in the establishment, performance and evaluation of social services (European Commission, 2007). The European Commission also presented an open list of characteristics reflecting the specific nature of social services as services of general interest and identified a number of more operational principles guiding social services (European Commission, 2007). The specific nature, aims, characteristics and principles could be considered as quality characteristics and quality requirements for Social Service of General Interest. In 2010 the Social Protection Committee presented a European Quality Framework for Social Services (Social Protection Committee, 2010). This voluntary Framework aims at being a reference for defining, assuring, improving and evaluating the

quality of social services. It should help policy-makers and public authorities in organising and financing social services. It should also help to develop at the appropriate level specific tools for the measurement and evaluation of social services' quality.

The challenge of defining quality

Quality analysis was primarily oriented towards tangible products. In the last decade, there has been a considerable bibliographical contribution to the quality of services. In many publications it is stated that the authors have an understanding about quality but they still have difficulties in expressing it. The basic problem for defining quality in the social sector is the lack of agreement on the quality concept itself. Quality concepts in the social sector often vary and differ. Quality is in the eye of different stakeholders and it has different meanings for different people.

Focusing on the field of organisations, public institutions or companies, quality has been defined in several ways: Juran considers product quality as *its suitability for use by those for whom it is intended* (Juran, 1988); Crosby defines quality as *the accommodation to clients' demands* (Crosby, 1979) ; Deming states that quality consists in the *contribution to the satisfaction of clients' needs* (Deming, 1981); Horovitz understands quality as *the level of excellence that the company has chosen to reach, in order to satisfy their key clients and, at the same time, the degree to which such quality is achieved* (Horovitz, 1992).

Quality in the provision social services differs from quality in the production process. In production, quality can be measured in the process of production and on the characteristics of the product. In social services provision, the quality of the service is measurable in the delivery process, on the characteristics of interaction between the professional and the person served and on the outcome of the service. Therefore quality requirements in the provision of social services always includes the perspectives of those who provide and those who are served and should be linked to the intended and expected outcome of the service.

The importance of service users' views

Services users views are a crucial way of testing and assessing for quality in social services. Therefore beginning it with users' and carers' experiences of social services could give an important contribution to the definition of quality. The knowledge and experiences of service users are the key to what constitutes good social services. Listening to them and then applying the lessons learned from them is the first step in the search for a valid definition.

The needs and expectations of persons served towards quality in social services have been examined in various ways and different levels. At the macro level, the opinion of the service users about quality in the social services has been expressed in 'The positioning paper on Quality in Social Services of General Interest (SGGI)': *A major pre-condition for quality of social services is identified by access to these services'. Access to social services by people with disabilities means that those services are affordable, available, and accessible. Quality of services should be a question combining the choice of the individual user and the availability and affordability of services with some basic quality guarantees. (High Level Group on Disability, 2007)* The macro level represents the general, political and fundamental statements concerning quality in SGGI from perspective of service users. At meso level the general statements will be operationalized for type of services. At a micro level the individual service users set his/her requirements on quality of services based on his/her individual

needs and expectations. The positioning paper of the High Level Group on Disability had been of great importance to the SSGI for people with a disability. It highlighted a common view of National Authorities of the EU member states and the European NGO's in the Disability sector on quality in the disability related social services and therefore it contributed to the development of the European Quality Framework for Social Services (Social protection Committee. 2010) and the development of common criteria for quality assurance.

In the report from the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions on "Quality in social public services" the role of user involvement has been identified as a crucial topic, and the result of the study presented is that the empowerment and participation of users in quality improvement has become an increasingly important focus of service quality (Pillinger, 2001). A good introduction to the analysis about what could be gained from involving users in setting the quality standards can be found in a study from the UK about what service users and carers want from social service workers (Harding and Beresford, 1996). Beresford points to the fact that the quality that service users want, are substantially different from those that professionals or service providers would be likely to select. They are not interested in efficiency or effectiveness but in what the service can do for them, how it can assist them to achieve what they want. Service users also emphasize that the way the service is delivered is of crucial importance. (Harding and Beresford, 1996)

At the European level the service user perspective is expressed in a quality paper of Inclusion Europe. Inclusion Europe introduced a philosophy about quality evaluation where the users and their advocates play the central roles. (Inclusion Europe, 2003) This focus on the users is placed in the context of a view on people with intellectual disabilities as users of social services. In the view of Inclusion Europe, individuals with intellectual disabilities are viewed as potentially strong consumers who actively evaluate and influence the quality of the receive services – of which they expect that these services meet their needs and expectations. (Inclusion Europe, 2003)

Inclusion Europe gives mainly two reasons why systems of quality management have to be complemented by instruments based on the perspective of service users:

1. The right to participation for people with intellectual disability has not only explicitly been enshrined in international treaties and conventions; it can also be deduced from their role as consumers. According to this role they have the power to influence the services which are paid to organise their personal support, the right to choose and to complain.
2. The right to self-determination implies that the role of individuals with intellectual disability is changing from the passive role of dependent recipients of care towards one of active consumers who determine themselves the goals they want to pursue and the changes they want to realise in their lives.

Quality approaches and quality system

The quality management approaches can be presented in two groups: international concepts and local Member State initiatives. (Faurshou, 2002) Both groups are used in the European Member States: International concepts are implemented in the social service sector at national level and also locally quality approaches have been developed and implemented. Most of the local quality initiatives in the European Member State in the social service sector have been inspired by and based on the international concepts.

There are a large variety of different quality approaches that can be applied in social services. In order to create an overview of this complex topic, a limited number of approaches will be analysed and described. A most important criterion for selection was that the quality approach could be applied in all types of social services at national and International level.

ISO 9001: 2008

Managing and operating an organisation successfully requires systematic and perceptible management. One road to success may be to implement and maintain a management system that is oriented towards constant service improvement by taking into consideration the demands of all interested parties. Along with other management disciplines, managing an organisation also comprises quality management.

The orientation of the Total Quality Management (TQM) follows eight basic principles of quality management for improving the capacity of an organisation:

1. Customer orientation: Organisations need their customers and, thus, should identify the current and future demands of the customers, comply with customer requirements, and aim at exceeding the expectations of their customers.
2. Responsibility of the management: Management personnel decide on the objectives as regards to the content, the direction, and the internal environment of the organisation. They provide for the environment where employees fully commit to the objectives of the organisation being achieved.
3. Inclusion of the persons involved: Employees characterise the nature of an organisation at all levels. Incorporating the same completely allows for utilising their abilities to the benefit of the organisation.
4. Process-oriented approach: The desired result can be achieved in a more efficient manner if related funds and activities are managed as process.
5. System-oriented management approach: Identifying, understanding, and managing a system with interrelated processes for a given objective provides a contribution to the efficiency and efficacy of the organisation.
6. Continuous improvement: Continuous improvement is a permanent objective of the organisation.
7. Task-oriented decision-making: Efficient decisions are based on data and information being analysed logically and intuitively.
8. Supplier relationships for mutual benefit.

In the course of time ISO 9001: 2008 was modified several times and adapted to the practical requirements in 2008 for the last time. Even if the basic structure nearly remained the same since 2000, formulations and terms have been adapted in a way that they are unambiguous. Within the framework of the most recent revision, the following modifications have to be emphasised:

1. Outsourced processes: The control of outsourced processes has to be specified within the framework of quality management. The same have to be checked in a way that they are a well-managed part of quality management as well.
2. Representative of the corporate management: The representative has to be a member of the management from the company; thus, this role cannot be outsourced.
3. Training and other measures to achieve the required capabilities do not have to be implemented when there are no corresponding offers and when other measures are not promising either. In case training measures are implemented, the required capabilities have to be acquired by the employees.
4. The product alone no longer determines the working environment; physical, ecologic, and other factors also play a role.
5. Phases of development: Evaluation of development, verification of development, and validation of development may also be combined and no longer have to be considered separately.
6. The term customer property now also explicitly covers personal data worthy of protection.

In the chapters on product maintenance and control of deficient products the formulations have been adapted in a way that they comply with the requirements of service providers.

The customer satisfaction was normally measured by customer surveys and by analysing customer complaints to date. The aforementioned also is to be enabled using other ways, for example by analysing lost offers, demands for warranty services, and dealer reports.

Business Excellence Framework by European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM)

The EFQM bases the processes of implementing and developing quality on facts and fact checks. "Management by facts" is the name of the principle.

The Business Excellence framework is an open framework concept serving to determine the progress of an organisation as regards to developing a "comprehensive quality management" (Total Quality Management). However, there is no ideal solution in accordance with this model, but many specific ways to quality.

The evaluation areas are divided into so-called "Enablers" and "Results". As regards to the enabler criteria, the question is HOW an organisation implements its main activities in the individual areas:

1. Management: how do behaviour and activities of the management team inspire, support, and promote a culture of comprehensive quality management?
2. Strategy and strategy planning: how is the strategy formulated, implemented operatively, and checked within the organisation?
3. Employee orientation: how does the organisation release the entire potential of the employees?

4. Resource management: how efficient and effective does the organisation use the resources?
5. Processes: how does the organisation define, check, and improve its processes?

The result criteria deal with the individual results, i.e. with the question of WHAT an organisation has achieved (result quality). The before mentioned comprises the following areas:

6. Customer satisfaction: what does the organisation accomplish as regards to the satisfaction of its customers?
7. Employee satisfaction: what does the organisation accomplish as regards to the satisfaction of its employees?
8. Effects on the society: handling of environment, maintenance of resources, relation to other organisations in the surrounding area, etc.
9. Key performance: what does the organisation achieve regarding the trading results when compared to its objectives?

The results side deals with the question of what the organisation has accomplished; the enabler side describes how these results were achieved. The fact that any evaluation within the framework of an assessment is based on a systematic collection and documentation of facts and not on subjective opinions is decisive. These facts are suitable for self-evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses, at which the following questions have to be answered in case of self-evaluation:

1. What are the strengths that can be developed and maintained with the help of existing processes?
2. What are the strengths still requiring further developments?
3. Which areas of improvement have been identified and determined as decisive areas?
4. How is the progress to be controlled as regards to the stipulated measures of improvement?

The EFQM Model is a non-prescriptive framework that recognizes that there are many approaches to achieving sustainable excellence. Within this non-prescriptive approach there are some fundamental concepts which underpin the EFQM Model.

European Quality in Social Services (EQUASS)

While most of the international quality approaches contribute to the efficiency of organisations and therefore focussed on the control of the internal processes (efficiency), the EQUASS quality approach is emphasising controlling in order to achieve desired results (effectiveness). The EQUASS defined quality as: "Meeting and exceeding the needs and expectations of all stakeholders". Therefore the EQUASS approach is a typical multi-stakeholder approach in which all stakeholders have been consulted in defining the criteria for quality certification. The EQUASS quality approach explicitly includes the perspective of service users and complies with the core criteria for Quality Assurance for Social Services of

General Interest (SSGI). The EQUASS approach also incorporates the methodology of self-assessment as a fundamental element for quality development and continuous improvement.

The European Quality in Social Services (EQUASS) is an initiative of EPR (European Platform for Rehabilitation), and provides comprehensive services of certification, training and consultancy in the area of quality. With its multi-stakeholder approach, EQUASS aims at enhancing the social service sector by engaging social service providers in quality and continuous improvement.

The implementation of the EQUASS criteria intends to have an impact on the internal development of certified organisations. The EQUASS certification programmes fully comply with the European requirements for quality in the social sector expressed in the European Quality Framework for Social Service (Social Protection Committee, 2010) and the European Quality Assurance Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)(Prime project, 2013)

EQUASS Assurance guarantees quality of service provision by certifying compliance with 50 criteria based on 10 Principles for Quality: Leadership, Staff, Rights, Ethics, Partnership, participation, Person centred approach, Comprehensiveness, Result orientation and Continuous Improvement. The Principles and criteria are the result of research and stakeholder consultations that will take place every 5 years. The EQUASS quality system therefore is adapted to the up-to-date and current demands and expectations of the key actors in the social sector: service users, service providers, social partners, funders and policy makers. An organisation that meets the EQUASS Assurance criteria is certified for a two years period. EQUASS Excellence is awarded to any service provider that can demonstrate sustainable achievements and continuous improvement on all Principles for Quality. The 50 EQUASS Excellence criteria are non-prescriptive in the sense that compliance can be achieved in various ways. They will be assessed on approach, deployment and results for each criteria. An organisation that meets the EQUASS Excellence criteria is certified for a three years period.

Conclusion

All actors in the social service sector (at National and European Level) emphasised the importance of assuring and managing quality in the provision of social services. They also emphasise the need for clear quality criteria in order to enhance and to assess the quality of the provided service. Their perspectives may result in various quality demands.

The identified quality criteria derived from current quality systems and from the demands from stakeholders can be categorised into the following four dimensions:

1. The organization (service provider): Organisations should be managed in a transparent way and are accountable on the financial and non- financial performance;
2. The professional: Organisations offer quality services provided by skilled and competent professionals and involve them in all processes;
3. The service user: Organisations respect fundamental rights of service users in terms of equal opportunities, equal treatment and freedom of choice, and equal participation and involve them actively in all processes ;
4. The provided services: Organisations offer services driven by the needs of both the person served and potential beneficiaries and achieving results by focusing on the

benefits for the person served, their family / carers, employers, other stakeholders and their communities.

All stakeholders, frameworks and systems recognised the importance of Quality Improvement. Some of them see Quality Improvement as an essential element of the Quality Guidelines in assuring quality in the provision of the services. Other stakeholders see Quality Improvement as a condition for delivery quality services and Quality Management as an element of Good Governance (Business Management). In all cases it is emphasised that quality improvement and quality management should be carried out in a systematic way.

Quality systems may support organisations in meeting the quality requirements set out in the Quality Frameworks for the Social sector and expressed by the stakeholders in the social sector. A research study carried out by Dortmund University (S. Frings e.o., 2011) reports that universal Quality Management systems, like ISO 9000 and EFQM, may result in a higher transfer of performance and adaptation of performances. Furthermore, the process of transformation may be characterized by a risk of misunderstandings and misinterpretations due to a non-uniform language code, as well as by diluted limits and limitations of individual systems that can be minimised by means of a sector-specific application reference and a “uniform” sector-specific language code. Therefore a sector-specific Quality system is recommended above the universal quality management systems.

In this study a specific recommendation is given to Quality Systems that act at the European level: *‘A European system has to be able to take into account the different national political-legal, socio-economic, and ethic-cultural particularities in an appropriate manner. Therefore non-prescriptiveness and flexibility in meeting the quality criteria are key features for a European Quality approach’.* (S. Frings e.o., 2011)



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