Implementing Basic Quality Techniques in Social Services:

The Case of DOKPY, Magnisia, Greece

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Abstract

The quality of products constitutes an important factor that influences the preferences of customers. Recently, there has been great interest specifically for the quality of services. This positive development is still moderated by the “immaturity” of the whole “system”, i.e. by the undeniable lack of experience of those involved in the improvement of the quality of services (executives, consultants etc.) and the fact that few systems of quality management have been implemented in services. In our research, we present the effort of implementing selected principles, techniques and procedures of quality (mainly according to ISO 9001:2000, which gives emphasis to the quality of services) in an organisation that offers “social” services. We show not only the difficulties but also the remarkable effectiveness of such an undertaking. In addition, we draw some useful conclusions for any relevant effort.

Key words: Services, Social Services, Quality Management Systems, Quality Techniques.
1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, during the last decades the quality of products constitutes a crucial factor that influences the preferences of customers. This has led to the long and intensive study, design and application of various techniques concerning the Statistical Quality Control of products: among plenty of others, some very important books are those of Western Electric [1], Grant and Leavenworth [2] and Montgomery [3], and some frequently cited publications are those of Duncan [4], Montgomery [5], Ho and Case [6]. It has also led to the development and implementation of various quality management systems (QMSs), like ISO 9001:1994 [7], ISO 9001:2000 [8], HACCP [9 & 10], ISO 14001 [11 & 12], EFQM [13 & 14] etc.

However, only recently, the interest about the quality of products has extended much further in order to include the quality of services offered by a number of different companies, as Sureshchandar et al. [15] also state in their paper. Therefore, it is not surprising that, at least in Greece, there is quite a lack of knowledge on quality issues that concern the services (McAdam and Canning [16] and Lagrosen and Lagrosen [17]) offered either by productive units, which accompany their products with a variety of services offered after the sale (e.g. training about the proper use of products, after sales service and maintenance, spare parts sales etc.) or by companies - organisations providing exclusively services (e.g. private or tutorial schools, hotels, technical offices, consulting companies etc.). This lack becomes obvious in a number of different ways. For example, from the limited number of QMSs that has been developed in the service sector, as well as from the fact that in most cases, in the QMSs of productive units there is still no reference on the accompanying services of their products. Moreover, it can be identified by the significant immaturity of the people involved in the improvement of quality of services, particularly of the personnel of organisations providing services as they are not sufficiently “quality
sensitive” compared to the personnel of certified and non-production units. In production units, quality is of high importance and is usually measured and controlled, resulting in a highly quality-sensitive work environment, which affects everyone working there.

Consequently, the main objective of this research is to present not only the remarkable effectiveness, but also the difficulties that came up during the effort to implement selected principles, techniques and procedures of quality - mainly according to the philosophy of the popular standards ISO 9001:1994 [7] and ISO 9001:2000 [8] - in the Municipal Organisation of Social Welfare and Health (DOKPY) in Nea Ionia, Magnisia, Greece (in the rest of the document the aforementioned effort will be mentioned as project and the author that was in charge of the project will be mentioned as quality consultant). We also present the actions taken and the manipulations that were necessary to overcome the difficulties that came up. We believe that the experience of this project could be pilot to any similar effort, considering the high complexity of the project caused by several particular characteristics of DOKPY and the special kind of services that it provides. In addition, it is certain that until the “system” matures adequately, similar difficulties will appear in any other attempt to implement quality techniques in the service sector and especially in social services.

In the recent literature, there is a limited number of similar projects that can be found, i.e. case studies with similar methodology or the same objectives. The most recent one is the case study of Sánchez et al. [19] who describe the implementation of the EFQM excellence model as a common framework for quality management in a regional health care service, in the Basque Country and also present the achieved results of their effort. The case study of Van Harten et al. [18] also concerns the introduction of a QMS in the

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1 A relevant choice about the proper QMS to implement in the service sector and more specifically in a rehabilitation hospital, was made by Van Harten et al. [18]. Though, Sánchez et al. [19] consider the EFQM model as the best quality politics for the health sector and quote a number of arguments to defend their choice.
health care and specifically in a rehabilitation hospital. In order to evaluate the development of the QMS they use the Dutch version of the EFQM self-assessment model.

In 1999, Singh and Deshmukh [20] study the initiation of quality in an educational institute and specifically at a consultancy and technology transfer wing. Once they recognized the need for quality initiatives, they used various tools to determine the initial status of the organisation and they made suggestions about the implementation of these initiatives. Shadur [21] identifies two different approaches to quality management: standards-based and culture-based. Their operation in a manufacturing and in a service organisation (the Australian Airlines) is reviewed. He discovers that standards-based approaches are more easily applied to manufacturing enterprises than to the service sector.

We should also mention the paper of Beaumont et al. [22] who identify and explain the differences in quality management practices between Australian manufacturing and service organisations, based on two surveys. A survey was also the basis for the research of Brah et al. [23], who examine the relationship between TQM and business performance in the Singapore service sector.

Finally, taking into consideration that the quality function deployment is a quality tool - process that has been introduced many times in the service sector, e.g. government, banking and accounting, health care, education and research etc., the reader should pay attention at the exhaustive literature review of Chan and Wu [24].

The following section comprises the profile and the particular characteristics of the structure and function of DOKPY, as well as the initial state of the Organisation at the beginning of the project. Section 3 presents the different stages of the project and exhibits the difficulties that came up, the actions taken to confront them and their effectiveness. The conclusions and the learned lessons from the whole project are presented in section 4.
2. Profile, structure and function of DOKPY

DOKPY was founded in 1995 by the Municipality of Nea Ionia, Magnisia, Greece as a municipal enterprise [25]. It is a non-speculative Organisation and aims at building social welfare structures in the area of the Municipality and at enhancing the first-degree health system in the city. However, DOKPY does not intend to substitute the actions of the state or the obligations of third parties for taking actions for the welfare and health. Secondarily, DOKPY studies and makes proposals regarding issues of social policy.

The demographic groups that this Organisation focuses on are all the citizens of the Municipality that ask for counselling and particularly those groups of people that are socially margined because of their origin, their language, their cultural particularities or financial state: e.g. the children of one-parent families, the ROMs, the handicapped, the elderly, the poor, the Greek repatriates, the immigrants etc.

DOKPY finances its activities through:

- the funding programmes (subsidies) of European Union’s Community Support Frameworks (CSF) and the European Commission,
- the programmatic contracts of indefinite time with the Municipality of Nea Ionia, Magnisia, and
- sponsorships.

At the beginning of the project - which lasted for one year (from February 2003 until January 2004) - it was noticed that the most important reason for the functional problems at DOKPY was that the increasing growth of the Organisation, as regards the number of personnel employed, the funding programmes that were undertaken, and the range of its activities, was not followed by a proper organisational structure. This structure should have included a clear organisation chart (O.C.), clear and balanced allocation of duties, specific policy for employment, clear and fair payment policy and definition of the
channels and ways of communication among the members of the personnel. As a result, DOKPY faced a number of problems, also met in other similar cases, i.e. overlaps or gaps in the allocation of duties, members of the personnel that were over-loaded while others were not efficiently utilized, debasement of important tasks or emphasis or unimportant ones, directors acting their subordinates’ duties, unpleasant work-environment etc.

It had not yet become clear to all DOKPY participants that the old structure of the Organisation with the limited personnel and the simple ways of functioning belonged to the past. The efficient operation of an Organisation, which employed about 40 people at that moment and potentially more in the future, demanded more advanced rules, techniques and organisational means. Methods and practices that could be tolerable in the past, even though they were not the most appropriate ones, could not be applied any more, due to the growth of the Organisation.

After the preliminary discussions between the quality consultant and the experienced top executives of the Organisation that contributed significantly to DOKPY’s growth (in the rest of the document they will be mentioned as administrative team), it was decided that the project should not aim at the complete development and implementation of a QMS in DOKPY, since such an effort would not be likely to succeed, due to the personnel’s immaturity on quality matters. What was chosen alternatively was the gradual initiation of the personnel into quality issues. Van Harten et al. [18] choosing to postpone the implementation of the advanced quality techniques of a complete QMS, also mention “…As it was not known how staff would react to a ‘simple’ model, the option to proceed to a more complicated and formalised system was left open (for the future).”

More specifically, the main objectives of the project were briefly to:

- Enhance the function of DOKPY and ensure the best effectiveness of its actions.

However, it was not an objective of the project to quantify the costs and the
improvement (using - perhaps - proper indicators to measure the progress), as it would have been in the case of the integration of a full QMS version within DOKPY.

- Improve the working conditions and the cooperation among the members of its personnel.
- Encourage the personnel to adopt the motto of “common effort and goals”.
- Have a “balanced” allocation of duties and authorities to all members of the personnel.
- Have the personnel develop the skill to evaluate their duties and distinguish among them according to their importance, so that they can focus their efforts on the most significant ones.
- Generally, prepare the personnel and the operation of DOKPY on the basic points of a QMS, so that in the future they will be able to develop an integrated QMS and probably have it certified by a registered authority.

At first, the identification of the special characteristics of DOKPY became necessary\(^2\) in order to define the proper quality techniques and procedures whose gradual application would result into the fulfilment of the objectives of the project. Their existence undermined the effectiveness of many actions, which in other more “typical” companies (e.g. production units - industries) would guarantee success. Thus, the project was more complicated and the necessary efforts more strenuous.

The main characteristic of DOKPY is that it is not self-governed. Instead, it is governed by literally two levels of authority (Figure 1): by the Municipal Council of the Municipality of Nea Ionia, Magnisia, at top level, which occasionally and not always discretely interferes, and by the Administrative Council of the Organisation, which has more direct administrative role. Additionally, these councils (especially the first one) are differentiated after every election result for the Municipality or the Prefecture. These two

\(^2\) They are summarized in Table 2.
factors cause a variety of functional problems at DOKPY: e.g. time-consuming or/and inefficient decision making processes, differentiation of the priorities given to the actions of the Organisation, modification of the available funds and the attention that the Councils pay to the work done by DOKPY etc.

Figure 1 about here

The *quality consultant* pointed out to the *administrative team* the necessity of realising frequent meetings with both Councils, especially with the Administrative one. At these meetings DOKPY’s work should be presented, along with the problems of the Organisation and its needs. There should also be suggestions for its improved and efficient operation. Overall, the ulterior objectives of these meetings should be:

- All the members of the Councils should become contributors to the effort made for DOKPY’s enhanced organisation and operation, through their frequent briefings and their extended participation in DOKPY’s issues.
- They should realise that DOKPY is one of the most dynamic “parts” of the Municipality. Therefore, they would all benefit if its work increased and found more funding resources.
- They should be persuaded that any “abnormal” interference with the operation of the Organisation (e.g. unorthodox or improper or over - hiring of personnel) would benefit them politically only in short-term. In long-term, they would endanger the operation of the Organisation and leave themselves exposed.

During the realisation of the *project only few members of the personnel of DOKPY actually worked to signed contracts of indefinite time*. In fact, there were only 4 people from a personnel of 40 members, due to the lack of funding of the Organisation for programmatic contracts with the Municipality of New Ionia. Most of the personnel were people who worked to contracts for a limited period of time. This situation affected
them in the most negative way, since they had no secure future in their job.

Therefore, it was pointed out to the administrative team of the Organisation that they should pursue the signature of more contracts of indefinite time or at least of contracts of a longer duration than those they did sign at the time of the project, i.e. contracts of 5 to 7 years instead of 1 or 2. Since that was probably an unattainable objective, it was also suggested that they should make clear to DOKPY’s personnel that the short duration of their contracts should not be a source of anxiety, insecurity or disinclination for work. On the contrary, it should be the incentive to work harder since their performance on the job would determine their future cooperation with DOKPY, even though that would be achieved with successive contracts of limited time, which could not offer working security.

According to a relevant particular operation of DOKPY, the members of its personnel signed contracts of labour or work with no other criterion but the different demands of the funding programmes. In general, the former are considered more privileged than the latter, in terms of the working conditions under any kind of employer, and that became the reason for disputes among the members of the personnel.

The quality consultant mentioned to the administrative team that when the strict demands of the programmes permitted it, the main criterion for the kind of contract that someone signed with DOKPY, should be his performance and efficiency, or for those new and not tested on the job yet, it should be their qualifications. An “upgraded” contract should be the incentive and the reward for a high performance and contribution.

The aforementioned particular ways of the operation of DOKPY were indicative of one more: the operation of DOKPY depended to a great extent on the demands of the funding programmes that it undertook. These were, after all, the main source of funding for the Organisation. Apart from the number of the personnel, the kind and duration of the contracts which they signed, there were still some more areas of dependency for DOKPY:
The realisation (or the continuance) or not of social actions according to the undertaking (or continuance) or not of relevant funding programmes respectively.

The inability to have differentiations during the programme to what was originally stated in the application expressing interest, e.g. in terms of the payment or the duties of those participating etc.

The loose and ultimately improper form of the O.C. at the beginning of the project could be attributed to the possibly inevitable acceptance by the Organisation of a certain structure of working teams for each funding programme (for further reference on this matter see the following paragraphs).

The existence of inexcusable differences in the personnel’s payment, even though they were doing the same or similar kind of work, due to their participation in programmes of different “financial ease”.

Even if, at that period of time, the accession into those funding programmes was necessary for the existence of the Organisation itself, it was pointed out to the administrative team that in the future the more independently DOKPY managed to operate, the more advanced his operations could become. This meant that eventually it would have to fund its actions using other sources so as not to be affected by the demands of the different programmes that it undertook. The autonomous operation of DOKPY would allow it to create independent and therefore more efficient organisational structures and procedures such as: a specific O.C., clear duties for - at least some - crucial working positions, common payment policy etc.

Apart from the aforementioned characteristics, the quality consultant discovered at the beginning of the project some additional problematic features, which were caused by erroneous practices of the past, falsely adopted by the administrative team. One of them was the lack of a properly structured O.C. (already mentioned) and clear job
descriptions for every category - working position (e.g. nurses, children animators, social workers etc.). This weakness was a result of not only the negative effect of the funding programmes, but also of the wrong choices of the inexperienced in such issues administrative team. According to DOKPY’s structure at that time, only two members of the administrative team had actual administrative authority, acting as a “double” supervisor/director of the rest personnel. The latter were in the lowest executive level of the O.C. Naturally, a variety of problems appeared such as vague duties, tendency to assist informally the other members of the personnel, the inability of some executives to accept the existence of supervisors etc.

There was an effort to clarify to everybody that the specific structure was problematic for many reasons; mainly for the following two. The fact that all members of the personnel of DOKPY were led simultaneously by two different directors could be very dangerous, even if their cooperation was perfect up to that point, e.g. in the case of a simple disagreement, since it is natural for two people not to have the same opinion about everything. Besides, leading a large number of subordinates resulted in having the two directors carry an overload of work.

The centralization of duties to the two directors was caused not only by the aforementioned structure of DOKPY, but also by their belief that the majority of the personnel was not capable of performing certain tasks. As a result, the directors undertook a lot of tasks in person, instead of training their subordinates for them. Thus, they were trapped in a vicious circle, where the members of the personnel were not trained and therefore they would never be considered capable of executing some more advanced (or not) tasks. Consequently, they would never be assigned these tasks, to avoid the risk of

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3 Even if various opinions have been expressed on this matter, it is generally believed that the optimal number of subordinates rarely exceeds the amount of 6 persons - see Graicunas [26] and Urwick [27].

4 Shadur [21] studied thoroughly the autonomy of managers (re-centralization) and the centralized control.
being ineffective the first time.

Besides, a large number of the personnel was trying to avoid certain tasks, as they were used to having somebody else doing them. An extreme aspect of this problem was the reluctance of some well-qualified personnel to take over positions of increased responsibility, e.g. to become supervisors, partly because the upgrading of their duties was not followed by an increase in their payment and mainly because of their fear of taking up new responsibilities. A development, which for the majority of the employees is an ambition and a means of professional reward, in the case of DOKPY was considered strangely enough, undesirable.

Finally, the continuous - and without any particular evaluation criteria - effort of the two directors to seek new funding programmes was really unjustified, as they were simply trying to soften the anxiety of the employees whose programmes were coming to an end. As a result, there were often applications for “inappropriate” programmes (e.g. of limited or inexistent interest, minor budget etc.), which above all increased the problem of the redundant personnel.

Table 2 about here

3. Stages, difficulties and results of the project

Considering the aforementioned special characteristics of the structure of DOKPY and the initial state of the Organisation (at the beginning of the project), and aiming at the smooth integration of the selected quality techniques in the way of working of its personnel, it was decided to carry out the project in 11 stages (Table 3). Their duration and time sequence are presented in Timetable 4. Then, depending on the stage, we summarize the objectives set, the implemented methodology, the accomplished assignments, the difficulties that came up during the project, as well as the result of the whole effort. Note
that the difficulties that came up have been particularly emphasized, as they are likely to come up in any similar future effort\(^5\). Just like in any other case, in the case of DOKPY, the quality consultant had to face the difficulties appropriately and overcome them by taking the right actions at each stage of the project.

*Table 3 about here*

*Timetable 4 about here*

The speech that was organised (stage 1) aimed to introduce the quality consultant to the personnel of the Organisation and to present the objectives of the project, as well as some primary thoughts regarding the effort that was about to begin. Its main points and the reasons why these were mentioned are presented in Table 5.

*Table 5 about here*

The results of the speech were quite impressive: the attendance was massive, even though the personnel were unfamiliar with quality issues, at that particular time. This was mainly due to the extent of the organisational problems of DOKPY and to the personnel’s hope that the project could solve them. In any case, the preparatory work of the administrative team contributed to the success of the speech. In the examples mentioned during the speech, the personnel found a lot of similarities (e.g. situations, problems etc.) with their own working environment, which increased their interest in the project and improved their level of entrustment to the quality consultant, even though it was reasonable that some of them would be buttoned-up towards the “new”.

Within the framework of stage 2, regular meetings of the quality consultant and the administrative team - especially the two directors - were held during the whole project. Their agenda was quite wide and depended on the stage and the progress of the project. Some indicative topics were the following:

\(^5\) Approximately the same way of presenting their project was used by Van Harten et al. [18], who chose to introduce their QMS in 6 subphases, also emphasizing the difficulties arisen.
• Gathering and analysis of data, such as list of personnel with information about their contracts, working experience, area of interest etc., forms for internal use in the Organisation, brochures about its actions etc.

• Creating the O.C. of DOKPY.

• Presenting some indicative job descriptions and procedures, as well as the methodology for their development to the administrative team.

• Presenting the conclusions that were inferred by the analysis of the questionnaires that were filled out by the personnel of DOKPY, exclusively to the two directors of the administrative team.

These meetings concurred to achieve many objectives, namely to write down the history of DOKPY, to define the particularities, the actions, the problems and the working conditions of the Organisation, to promote the work of the stage that was implemented while each meeting was taking place, to evaluate the progress of the project and to improve the knowledge of all participants. Unfortunately, the data gathered for the briefing of the quality consultant was not complete, clear and organised and that unavoidably led to the increase of the number of relevant meetings, burdening the work that was being executed at that time.

The positive attitude of the personnel of DOKPY after the speech of stage 1 was followed by their impressive response during stage 3. The majority of them filled out willingly and sincerely the specially designed questionnaire distributed to them (Questionnaire 6 is a condensed version of the actual one). In addition, the personnel responded positively during the private meetings with the quality consultant. It was quite encouraging that the personnel realised the usefulness of the specific assignments and perceived the questionnaire and the meetings as they should have: as a “chance” to express their opinions and problems; a chance which they might not have again in the near future.
A lot of important information was gathered from the questionnaires and the private meetings. Their analysis revealed the working problems of the personnel, as well as the management and operational problems of DOKPY. This record affected significantly the areas of interest of the following stages, because in the rest of the project the effort also focused on these problems. Due to confidentiality reasons, only a few problems detected are mentioned in Table 7. However, they were all presented thoroughly to the two directors of the administrative team, in order for the project to achieve the best results possible.

The last task of stage 3 was the evaluation of the personnel of DOKPY, which pointed out the ones that were qualified enough to undertake more active duties in the future and, consequently, it helped form a more efficient O.C.

One of the main objectives of the project was to form an appropriate O.C. and to allocate duties and responsibilities to DOKPY’s personnel, according to their skills and the relevance of tasks (stage 4). The methodology followed included the mapping of the present - at that time - O.C. and of the operational structure of DOKPY, in collaboration with the two directors. Thus, a necessary point of reference was defined: if the new O.C. was significantly different from the old one, no matter how perfectly structured, it would still not be able to be put into effect.

In the following phases of this stage the entire administrative team participated, in order to ensure the maximum acceptance and “support” of the new O.C., considering that it would be a compromise of all the conflicting views being expressed. It was decided that its final form (Figure 1) should outline not only the two basic actions of DOKPY (Welfare, as Direction of Equality and Employment and Health, as Health Direction), but also the financial services (as an Accounts Office under the General Manager’s supervision) and all
the “non-social” actions, e.g. public relations, research etc. (as *Direction of Research and Innovation*). Given that the actions of Welfare had been multiplied over the years, the corresponding Direction was split further into Departments, using as criterion the age of the people being serviced at the Organisation. Thus, all the funding programmes of DOKPY could be allocated to these Departments according to the age of the basic group of people being serviced: e.g. a programme that concerned primarily children and secondarily their parents could be allocated to the *Department of Children and Adolescents*, instead of the *Department of Adults*. The same expansion was also realised in the *Direction of Research and Innovation*. Finally, in order to avoid frequent revisions of the O.C., it was agreed that in every revision, the Directions, the Departments or the important funding programmes that would not be active temporarily, should also be included in the chart but in a shaded form, as they could be activated sometime in the near or distant future.

Undoubtedly, a great difficulty at the beginning of stage 4 was the delay in the mapping of the present - at that time - O.C. of DOKPY, because the two directors were unable to describe precisely the correlations among the personnel and the actions of the Organisation. This difficulty revealed an important but disguised up to that time problem: the operation of a large organisation with no actual O.C. However, the delay during the design of the new O.C. was even bigger, as some members of the *administrative team* tended to evaluate and revise its form continuously. Even though everybody recognized the need for radical change in the structure of DOKPY - even the young and inexperienced members of the personnel had realised that the present operational status caused a lot of problems - some people were hesitant about making decisions, showing procrastination and cautiousness to anything new. The total delay was undoubtedly negative, as a lot of time was consumed at this stage, to great disadvantage of other stages. Even worse was the fact that even after the completion of the *project*, the new O.C. was only partially adopted.
Regarding the job descriptions of the personnel (stage 5), the forms of data and information recording (stage 8) and the procedures of application of certain tasks or actions (stage 9), it was decided to design a limited but indicative number of every category. We did not aim to cover the total need of DOKPY for documentation, but to demonstrate the basic principles for the development and use of every quality tool, and additionally to train relatively some members of the personnel. During their development, emphasis was given mainly to the consistent terminology, content clarity, unified form and style of every quality tool, correct process of revising the versions and maintaining the prototypes, etc.

The pilot job descriptions originated from all the levels of the O.C., consequently the requirements and difficulties of their formation varied: General Manager, Director of the Centre for Children’s Creative Activities (KDAP), Social Worker, Children Animators of KDAP, Nurse and House-keeper. In terms of the methodology used, at first the information gathered from the personnel through the questionnaires of stage 3 was utilized. Their duties were grouped for every category - working position and then, they were extended either using other sources (e.g. suggestions made in funding programmes) or based on the knowledge of the administrative team about the subject of every working position or, finally, based on the special skills of the personnel, which were identified by the quality consultant during stage 3.

Concerning the forms that were developed during the project, the main intention was to familiarize the personnel with their use and to integrate them efficiently in their work. Thus, the personnel would be positively inclined to any future increase of the amount of forms. Therefore, it was decided to design some pilot forms, which would ensure successful integration, like the Form of intercommunication, Form of allocation of duties, Form of the results of meetings, Form of messages while being absent etc.
Writing mainly the indicative job descriptions (stage 5), as well as the procedures (stage 9) lasted quite long, mostly because of the inexperience of DOKPY’s personnel. Nevertheless, the results were the expected ones: the personnel gradually exhibited a remarkable progress and in the end they were able to form any other job description or procedure. At the same time, the personnel for whom job descriptions were designed expressed their satisfaction for the detailed and clear mapping of their duties. On the other hand, everybody involved in the implementation of the new procedures (Meetings of the administrative team, Treatment of Beneficiaries and Operation of a management team for funding programmes) were enthusiastic about the clarification of these actions of the Organisation, even though the procedures were formed towards the end of the project and therefore they could not be completely utilized; however, that could happen in the near future. The success of the pilot forms was even bigger, as they managed to solve a lot of problems that existed at DOKPY before their coming to use.

In between the aforementioned stages a seminar of 20 hours was held with the following subject: “Basic concepts of quality - Principles, Demands, Ways of implementation and Advantages of a QMS” (stage 7). Its ulterior aim was to train the personnel on these topics, focusing on similar efforts made by equivalent organisations. Some of the topics discussed were: definitions of quality, quality terminology (QMS, TQM, Standard, ISO etc), cost of quality, the seven quality tools, various QMSs, the ISO 9001:1994 requirements, the transition to the ISO 9001:2000, principles and tools of a QMS: contents of a quality manual, indicative quality policy, samples of job descriptions, procedures and forms. The results of the seminar were satisfactory, considering the positive remarks of the participants in the evaluation form and their interest in the topics discussed.

During the penultimate stage 10 of the project, which lasted for about 2 months, the
The personnel and the quality consultant had the chance to monitor the implementation of the quality principles, techniques and procedures that were incorporated in DOKPY’s operation, and act accordingly. For example, it was necessary for the style and content of some forms to be altered in order to be more user-friendly, for some job descriptions to be modified due to specific functional problems that arose while they were in effect and for some procedures to be adjusted in order to become more specific and to eliminate the possibility of a problematic application.

The quality consultant’s writing and submitting of an intermediate report and a final report (stages 6 and 11 correspondingly) served similar objectives. Both of them (mainly the final report) could be utilized at any time by the personnel of DOKPY and the members of its Councils (Municipal and Administrative), as well as by any consultant that might be involved in quality-related issues. Both reports included a variety of information that could become the starting point of any similar project. In addition, the intermediate report, which exhibited the results of the 1st part of the project (Table 3), also aimed at mentioning the progress of the project up to that point and the quality consultant’s thoughts. Thus, it became possible for the project to have an intermediate evaluation and then a redefinition of its next stages and priorities.

Naturally, several other tasks were also carried out during the project, which could not be clearly included in one of the 11 stages. However, they resulted positively, more or less, on the whole effort that was made. The most important tasks were in brief:

- The quality consultant participated in a randomly selected meeting in order to make comments and suggestions aiming at improving and upgrading all similar meetings. For example, it was highlighted that the duration and the agenda of the meeting should be defined in advance, all duties assigned should be properly written down etc.
- At the end of the project an event for DOKPY’s personnel was organised, where the
quality consultant presented its progress, the tools developed during the project (O.C., job descriptions, written procedures etc.) and the results drawn after the analysis of the questionnaires that were filled in, during stage 3. Regarding these questionnaires, the General Manager of DOKPY had the opportunity to present the corrective actions made in order to satisfy the several requests and/or problems of the personnel.

- The quality consultant commented on the DOKPY’s brochures that had been scattered to the citizens of Nea Ionia, in terms of their deficiencies, their vagueness and the terminology used in them.
- A search for other Organisations providing services (welfare or not) and having dealt with quality issues was done, so that they could be contacted for exchanging information.

4. Conclusions

After the completion of the project, the majority of the personnel of the Organisation became more “quality sensitive” because of their contact and familiarization with quality issues, as well as their long experience with them. During the twelve months of the project a lot of principles, concepts, techniques, tools and policies of quality were presented, discussed and clearly understood, improving the general operation of DOKPY. As a result of all these, after the completion of the project the personnel of the Organisation and mainly the administrative team became more qualified and consequently more effective in making judgments and decisions regarding quality issues and policies that could be implemented in DOKPY.

A thorough study of most of the stages of the project can give us some very interesting lessons, useful to any similar future effort:

- Taking into consideration the speech of stage 1, we see that it is crucial for the progress
of a project that the quality consultant wins the respect, approval and confidence of the personnel.

- The realisation of stage 2 shows that all relevant meetings should be very well-prepared and organised in order to take full advantage of time and become as effective as possible.

- The completion of the questionnaires and the meetings of stage 3 reveal that by persuading the personnel to dare to speak, a lot of useful information comes to surface, which can truly enlighten the effort of a project.

- Considering the development of the O.C., we see that it is always important to consider the initial state of the organisational structure and treat it as a point of reference: any radical change is likely to scare everybody off and lead the effort to a dead-end.

- Stages 5, 8 and 9 show that the documentation of any QMS should be assigned to a specific member of the personnel, who, additionally, should be properly qualified for this duty.

- The probationary period of every radical or not change (stage 10) is absolutely necessary for the appropriate set-up operation.

An important conclusion drawn from the examination of the project as a whole is that the immaturity of the system (whose parts are the service organisations, their personnel, even their consultants) due to the considerable lack of knowledge on the quality matters of the offered services, causes the appearance of plenty of difficulties during the realisation of relevant projects and is often the reason for their partial - at least - inefficiency. The existence of the aforementioned difficulties requires a strenuous and long-lasting effort made from all the participants so that the desired outcome is achieved.

On the other hand, the immaturity of the parts involved paves the way for similar projects considering that even the implementation of very simple techniques and quality
procedures (e.g. the use of simple forms) often brings in important results, which stimulate the participants and provide the necessary boost for the implementation of more sophisticated techniques. Consequently, in similar cases it is better initially to apply simple quality techniques, which will be replaced later by more sophisticated ones. This means that the order of tasks is crucial for the effectiveness of the project.

Every time a QMS is implemented, it is mentioned in literature that the commitment of the top executives of the interested company is absolutely necessary (e.g. Juran and Gryna [28]). It is reasonable that the same principle applies also in the case of implementing simple quality techniques like ours. In the case of DOKPY, the different degree of devotion of “key” members of the personnel to the objective of the project and at the same time, their different perception and comprehension of quality issues, came up in the most negative way. The indecisiveness of some members of the administrative team, as far as the development and implementation of the new O.C. was concerned, has mainly lead to this conclusion. The willingness to accept the necessary changes, no matter how extensive they are, increases with the commitment and devotion of the top executives to the objective of the project, as well as with their accurate perception of quality issues. If this is not the case, then there are a lot of obstacles and a strong tendency to postpone any kind of change to a future, more suitable moment in time, as they say. However, the presumed suitable time never comes, unless there is decisiveness.

Acknowledgments

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References


Figure 1: Organisation chart of DOKPY
Table 2: Special characteristics of DOKPY

- Two levels of authority govern DOKPY: the Municipal Council of the Municipality of Nea Ionia, Magnisia and the Administrative Council of the Organisation.
- Only 4 people from a personnel of 40 members in DOKPY actually worked to signed contracts of indefinite time.
- The members of DOKPY’s personnel signed contracts of labour or work with no other criterion but the different demands of the funding programmes.
- The operation of DOKPY depended to a great extent on the demands of the funding programmes that it undertook.
- DOKPY was missing a properly structured O.C. and clear job descriptions for every category - working position.
- There was a centralization of authorities to the two directors of DOKPY.
- A large number of the personnel was trying to avoid some particular tasks.
- There was a continuous and without any particular evaluation - criteria effort of the two directors to seek new funding programmes.
Table 3: The stages of the project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Aim of the stage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Organisation of an introductory meeting - speech with the personnel of the Organisation</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Conduction of regular meetings with the administrative team</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Completion of an especially developed questionnaire by the personnel of DOKPY, private meeting of the quality consultant with them, evaluation and development of their profiles</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Development of a flexible and realistic O.C.</td>
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<td>Development of indicative job descriptions</td>
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<td>Writing of an intermediate report with the results of the 1st part of the project and the suggestions made for its continuation</td>
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<td>2nd</td>
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<td>Conduction of a seminar with the subject “Basic concepts of quality - Principles, Demands, Ways of implementation and Advantages of a QMS”</td>
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<td>Development of indicative forms of data and information recording</td>
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<td>Development of indicative procedures for task executions or realisation of activities</td>
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<td>Pilot implementation of the new operational way</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Writing of a final report with the results of the whole project</td>
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### Timetable 4: Duration and time sequence of the stages of the project

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**Table 5: Main points of the speech and reasons of mentioning them**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Main point</th>
<th>Reason to mention</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DOKPY had been operating in difficult times, facing a wide range of difficulties such as financial, social and organisational</td>
<td>The personnel should realise the reasons that led to the implementation of the <em>project</em> and accept smoothly the process of changes which was about to begin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despite the difficulties, DOKPY was an entity which was increasing continuously both its size and the number of its actions. So, a lot of them were worthy of all praise</td>
<td>The encouragement and the reward of the personnel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some of the ulterior objectives of the <em>project</em>: i.e. change in the way of facing various matters (work mentality and methodology), utilization of the personnel according to their special skills etc.</td>
<td>The information of the personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even if all members of the personnel were considered “specialists” in their field of operation, they could still improve their skills and become more qualified. Therefore, they should be willing to extend their field of expertise and cooperate</td>
<td>To make them more receptive to anything new that they would have to accept or implement</td>
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<td>One of the objectives of the <em>project</em> was to maintain the positive parts and improve only the problematic ones</td>
<td>To put their concerns at rest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Both DOKPY and its personnel could benefit from the potential positive results of the <em>project</em>; working security, improved working conditions (financial and non-) etc.</td>
<td>Additional motive for cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The completion of the questionnaire was a chance for everyone to express its opinion and “be heard”</td>
<td>To ensure the sincerity and willingness of the personnel during stage 3</td>
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</table>
Questionnaire 6: Specially designed questionnaire, which was distributed to the personnel of DOKPY

- Name: ___________________________ Date: ___________________
- Date of Birth: ___________________
- Education/training: ____________________________

- Seminars: __________________________________________

- Foreign Languages:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Average</th>
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</table>
  a) __________ |          |      |         |
  b) __________ |          |      |         |

- Working experience at DOKPY:
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Area of interest</th>
<th>Years</th>
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- Working experience excluding DOKPY:
<table>
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<th>Company</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years</th>
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- Who is your supervisor? __________________________

- Who are your subordinates?
  a) __________________________
  b) __________________________

- Who are your partners?
  a) __________________________
  b) __________________________

- Analytic descriptions of your duties, including the percentage or the amount of time that you are occupied with them.
  E.g. for the secretariat:
  - Documents - letters composing (10% of my time or 1 hour/day or 3 hours/week etc.).
  - Telephone exchange (30% of my time etc.).
  - Mail delivery (5% of my time etc.).
  - (potentially) unexploited time (10% of my time etc.) etc.

- Which of your current duties do you think that you should not perform and why?

- Which other duties do you think that you should also have?

- Which are the 3 main problems (if they exist) that you think you face while performing your duties?

- Which organisational improvements do you think that could help you perform your allocated duties more effectively?
Table 7: Problems detected from the questionnaires and the private meetings

- Several sources of disagreement and annoyance were found among the personnel. They could all come to surface, sooner or later, and have a negative effect on the offered services of DOKPY. Their existence could partly be explained by the loose organisational structure of DOKPY, which allowed such issues to expand whereas in other cases they would have been diminished.

- It was obvious that a lot of members of the personnel felt insecure about their future at the Organisation, due to the short duration of their contracts (see further information in section 2). Their insecurity made them nervous and even suspicious of the actions of their directors and often led them to an unfair competition among them.

- A lot of members of the personnel expressed their wish to have their role in the Organisation as well as the structure of DOKPY become clear to them, approving the incorporation of stages 5 and 4, respectively, in the project.

- There was a tendency for providing informal help among the personnel in a number of different assignments (also mentioned in section 2).

- Several members of the personnel admitted that they found it difficult to accept the existence of supervisors (also mentioned in section 2) whom they criticized negatively for some of their choices.