

ASSESSMENT ON TECHNOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS OF STATE MANAGEMENT IN HA NAM PROVINCE FOLLOWING THE NATIONAL STANDARDS ISO 9001:2000

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Abstract:

State administrative management in Vietnam has been step by step reformed and regularly evaluated in line with the state organizational machinery. A new form of management being applied is to follow the national standards ISO 9001:2000; it is actually a set of International Standards applicable to Vietnam, in nature, on the other hand, it is a technology.

Since 2007, Ha Nam province and other provinces in the country have applied the ISO 9001:2000 in the field of state administrative management. Like other provinces, Ha Nam has encountered many conflicting matters that should be analyzed and studied with a view to improve the policies accordingly.

This paper presents an assessment on technological constraints in applying the national standards ISO 9001:2000 in state administrative management in Ha Nam province and proposes solutions for further improvement in the application of such standards.

Keywords: *State management operation; Technology policy; National standard TCVN ISO 9001:2000.*

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1. Theoretical basis of the assessment

1.1. The role of assessment in State management

Assessment is an integrated part of the management process, it aims to measure the level of performance compared against assessment standards. Within the scope of this paper, the author focused only on two main causes of the constraints using a basic standard, i.e, level of satisfaction of citizens and organizations (customers), expressed in two specific aspects:

- The organization's ability in providing stably products/services that meets the customer needs and related institutional requirements.
- Raising the customer's satisfaction level by an effective and frequently improved operation of the system.

1.2. The role of technological assessment

Evaluation of the state administrative management performance is a regular task and this has been assigned to a specialized body, i.e Interior Affairs Agency at all different levels. But the method as well as the content of assessment have been only based on state management theories without mentioning the technological aspect.

The national standard ISO 9001:2000 is a technology in nature because its content has impact on the system. Therefore, only by conducting technological assessment, we can get insights of the nature of the limitations in the application process.

1.3. Technological assessment on the state administrative management according to TCVN ISO 9001:2000

According to the National Standards ISO 9001:2000 the quality of public administration activities is often expressed by the ability to meet the requirement of “the people”. As a common term, application of technological means a process of creating products, therefore *Standard assessment of state administrative activities should be the satisfaction of citizens.*

The standards themselves provide requirements for the state administrative management system for assessment including the self-assessment, assessment for accreditation and re-assessment which creates a continuous cycle to improve the process. But they are only requirements (the things have to do) and the question of how to do is the duty of each agency involved.

Technological assessment allows us to evaluate not only what has been done but also how to meet the assessment standards.

1.4. The relationship between commonly applied technology and specific technology

The commonly applied technology provides general framework of requirements, it can apply to many types of technology, while specific technology is the one applies only to a specific process or product. As the analysis mentioned above, in the state management practice, commonly applied technology is the application of ISO standards and specific technology is the services provided by public agencies.

These two technologies are efficient only if they are unified in objective and competence level.

Specific technology plays a decisive role on the results of commonly applied technology on the principle that "good results can only achieved when the process of generating them operates well".

Commonly applied technology has positive impact on the coordination of processes involved, provides conditions and through its regulations makes specific technologies work together on track in a complete and stable manner.

1.5. Assessment on technological constraints in state administrative management according to the national standards ISO 9001:2000

- Technological assessment on state administrative management under Vietnamese standards ISO 9001:2000 is to assess the level of satisfaction of people. By recognizing this national standard is a commonly applied technology, it suggests us to find out what specific technologies should be? What are the requirements need to be satisfied. On the other hand, by knowing specific technologies in administrative management, we understand how public services should be provided. Looking back the application policies, we realize that there is a lack of policy for public services. This means the policy to apply these standards requires policy for public services.
- The policy in public services in state administration is to improve the satisfaction of the people, an objective indispensability, and it is quite implementable. The most reasonable model of applying the ISO 9001:2000 is simultaneously to standardize public services.

2. Actual situation of state administrative management in Ha Nam province following the national standards ISO 9001:2000; policy on public services

2.1. Current status of application of the standards TCVN 9001:2000 for state management in Ha Nam Province

2.1.1. Objective

The application of the quality management system following the standards ISO 9001:2000 has the objectives as follows:

- Supervise working processes in public agencies, improve quality and efficiency of the management and provision of public services.
- Apply advanced management technologies accumulated by of mankind to build up and implement a system of processes to deal with public services in a scientific manner, in light of the direction of making it

more open, transparent in terms of rights and responsibilities of every organizations and individuals involved; this is one of the important programs in the administrative reform process with the aim to overcome weaknesses and inadequacies of the present state administrative agencies. The results of the process will bring great benefit for society and community.

- Admitted as the 150th official member of the World Trade Organization, Vietnam shall be facing many new opportunities and challenges. Implementation of Quality Management System following ISO standards will make positive contribution for the country to take advantage of opportunities, overcome challenges, accelerate the process of development and integration of the country, in general and of Ha Nam Province, in particular.

2.1.2. Requirement

- The application of *the quality management system* under ISO standards in state administrative agencies in the province should be done in synchronized manner. Attention should be paid to strengthen material infrastructure and empowerment of staff, officials and employees in an appropriate way to avoid massive application and merit achievement tendency.
- Implementation plan should be in prioritized order with attention to agencies/units of heavy administrative procedures, working directly with organizations, individuals or having pressing problems arisen in public opinion.
- ISO standards application must be maintained, continuous monitored with long-term, annual assessment/conclusions in those agencies which have been completed the process of quality management system. Frequently focused on the improvement of the system with a view to bringing it into full play and be consistent with laws of development and the actual conditions of each agency.

2.1.3 Legal Basis

- Decision 144/2006/QĐ-TTg dated 20/6/2006 of Prime Minister concerning "*Application of quality management system according to National standards ISO 9001: 2000 in state administrative agencies*".
- Other relevant legal documents.

2.2. Content, implementation arrangement

- Giving guidance to functional authorities to carry out propaganda, advocacy, dissemination of relevant information, providing guidelines and requesting applicable agencies to register and prepare plan to apply the ISO *Quality Management System*.
- Giving guidance for the development of a comprehensive and annual roadmap of the ISO Quality Management System according to ISO in the province; ensuring that by 2010 all administrative agencies of the Provincial and all District People's Committees be completed with the application of ISO *Quality Management System*.
- Giving guidance for amendment/revision of functions and responsibilities of state administrative agencies of provincial, district and commune People's Committees to comply with the requirement of the application of the ISO *Quality Management System*.
- Giving guidance for allocation of appropriate funding from the annual state budget for state administrative agencies in the province for the implementation of the ISO *Quality Management System*.
- Conducting initial assessment and periodic monitoring on the application of the ISO *Quality Management System*, and the maintenance, improvement of the system by agencies having successfully applied the ISO *Quality Management System*.

3. Assessment on technological constraints of state management in Ha Nam province following the national standards ISO 9001:2000

3.1. Findings drawn from results of document review

Besides some positive results achieved, the process of implementing Decision 144/2006/QĐ-TTg still exposed some shortcomings needed to overcome, i.e:

3.1.1. For the state administrative agencies

1. Leaders of several agencies had not high determination, not strong interest in the development and application of quality management system, assigned tasks to their lower staff without close and strict supervision. There were cases where the quality management system was contracted to consulting firms with little involvement of officials themselves. Therefore, the quality management system was of formal character, resulting no improvement in the agency's activities, the goal

of building quality management system was not achieved, leading to inefficient services, causing waste of state funding and low spirit in the agency (no correct understanding on the quality management system, reduced effectiveness of the administrative reform program).

2. Leaders of some agencies did not fully understand the quality management system following ISO 9001:2000, so they could not provide close guidance in budgeting the entire operation of the agency. In some cases, there occurred phenomenon of overestimating the cost of consultancy for the construction of quality management system compared to the actual advisory workload, causing losses to the state budget; or in other case underestimating the cost of consultants, leading low quality of the service due to copy of the system of other agencies.
3. Wrong purpose of building the quality management system. It was to get the system certified, not care about the quality of the system. This phenomenon also caused waste of State budget due to funds spent but the intended objectives not achieved.

3.1.2. For consulting firms contracted for the development of the quality management system

1. Some consulting organizations had not been trained sufficiently on ISO 9001:2000; they were profit making and tried to meet the deadline. Consulting agencies were not able to provide guidance to administrative bodies on how to set up documentation systems and relevant processes, little involvement of the agency's personnel resulting in low effective system.
2. Some consulting organizations did not place importance on the training of their consultants involved, did not comply with principle of using eligible consultants even some of them in the consulting team had not much knowledge in state administrative management and quality management system, thus resulting low quality of expert advice.
3. Evaluation organizations sometimes also had no objective in assessing the constructed quality management system; using incompetent assessment experts and did not fulfil their responsibility to help administrative agencies to detect drawbacks in the process of operation.
4. There was no clear direction of the scope of application of the system and it did not pay attention to the compliance of the principles of good quality management as indicated in the standards ISO 9000.
5. The scope of application of the quality management system in respective administrative agencies was of unclear direction that would

directly affect the budget plan and the implementation of such procedures as well as the general efficiency of the agency's operation.

6. Normally, administrative agencies will take step to apply the quality management system in a few specific activities under the functions and responsibilities of the agency in order to gradually become familiar with the new management thinking. However, if there was not a clear direction and a clear roadmap to expand the scope of application, it may quickly see that the effective application of the system would be limited due to lack of synchrony.
7. Administrative agencies will also be, at the same time, under great pressure of high social expectations about the real and efficient improvement of the state administrative work for which administrative agencies are responsible against the low performance of the system.

3.1.3. Application of the quality management system according to national standards ISO 9001:2000

1. Problems still exist, e.g, though the process had clearly defined job descriptions and person in charge there was little change in spirit of service; Leaders paid not much attention to the application, considering it as a project with the ultimate goal of "getting the system certified".
2. Government officials had not clear perception of the relation between their jobs and the goals of the system, not involved in building the system from the outset, regarded applying ISO was of the Steering Committee's responsibility; confusion between workflows and terms of reference of each functional department.
3. Existed two parallel management systems due to inconsistency between processes written subjectively by consultants and the existing work processes; the results of statistical survey on the satisfaction level of administrative agencies' customers were not representative, realistic; there was no synchronous coordination among different units in an administrative agency.
4. Duration of more than 3 years for all state administrative agencies from the district to upper levels to apply ISO 9001:2000 in a synchronized manner was a challenge. Pressure of workload and deadline for the system to be certified could make Head of administrative agency issue decision to apply ISO 9001:2000 while the agency was not quite ready in terms of psychology, awareness, trained personnel... It could lead to a situation that the application was not deployed in the whole system but in a small number of discrete activities, two parallel management

systems existed, one followed old procedures and the other followed ISO standards.

5. Massive application carried out simultaneously in most of state administrative agencies requires a large number of qualified personnel involved such as consultants, trainers, certifying officers and the "tempo run" could create unfair competition in selecting such personnel.
6. Most state administrative agencies with similar functions in different localities, it might lead to duplication of the documentary system, design without considering specific local characteristics of each individual agency.
7. Pressure on the certified application and the deadline might be abused as a legal basis in the reorganization of work and personnel; this mismanagement could lead to low effectiveness and less benefit of the administrative reform.
8. When deployed decision 144/2006/QĐ-TTg, it should focus on the management capacity of the agency involved and ensure a healthy competition among training, consultancy, certification audit organizations in order to ensure the quality of the application of ISO 9001:2000 in state administrative agencies.
9. Training and raising awareness for staff of administrative agencies should be considered as a key issue in the implementation of decisions 144/2006/QĐ-TTg to ensure decisive role of leadership and voluntary participation of all staff members.
10. There should be a clear roadmap, priority of application should be given to eligible agencies which have been well prepared in terms of awareness, capacity and motivation, then moving to the next phase with lessons learnt. Try to avoid massive deployment, racing for merits.
11. There should be incentive policies to encourage bright spots of this process. The evaluation should not base on the number of agencies having certified or getting early completion, number of processes/procedures promulgated or number of inappropriate work processes as highlighted by evaluation organizations, but it should look at number of positive changes obtained, the integration of ISO standards in management system and the level of transparency, speed, convenience of the services provided to other state administrative agencies concerned as well as to citizens.
12. It could confirm that the orientation of application of quality management system according to ISO 9001:2000 standards in the

operation of administrative agencies is a right policy. However, the use of an advanced management technology effectively in the administrative offices with a particular characteristic still needs to continue with in-depth research and improvement of the way of implementation.

After study on the actual application, based on the research and sociological survey results, and opinions of experts it was observed that the application of Vietnamese Standard ISO 9001:2000 in Ha Nam compared with the target of customers' satisfaction still showed some constraints. There are reasons for this, as follows:

1. It was difficult to know how to apply many requirements of the standards, therefore, there was a phenomenon to pass the ball between applying units and consulting bodies. Provincial Steering Committee concluded that "research more must be conducted at the successful places and further study documentation to provide better guidance".
2. Some areas have applied the standards for the purpose of certification and satisfactory assessment, so there still exists two parallel systems at the same time: one formal for certification and one dealing with practical works.

4. Policy solution of standardized public services in the application of standards ISO 9001:2000 in Ha Nam province

4.1. Standardized public services and application of quality management system are supplementary to each other.

4.1.1. Standardized public services make the application of quality management system more convenient and simple

- When developing the system with standard public services, it should introduce standardized services into respective work processes, it would not be time-consuming and costly, therefore it is not necessary to hire outside consultants.
- Once there is a set of specific evaluation criteria, then the evaluation will be easy, accurate and does not take much time.
- It also helps controlling agency when operating with standard public services as both controller and implementer of public service easy to agree or in case there are disagreements, we have criteria for argument, so it can reduce the workload for controlling agency.

- Standardized public services are the best solution to limit the individuality of officials, help people to look straightforward to the goal of the system.
- When improvement completed, key issues obtained without waste of money and effort.

4.1.2. Standardized public services decides the quality of the system

- Standardization of public services is the decisive factor to the success or failure of the system. With standardized public services, the quality management operation following ISO will be more systematic. In case, in the absence of ISO but existed standardized public services the objective of customers' satisfaction still be achievable but with low stability.
- Standardization will have impact on the quality control system, making it be adjusted to meet the requirement of standards.

4.1.3. Quality Management System following national standards ISO 9001:2000 has a positive impact on the direction of the system to satisfy customers whether they are organizations or citizens

- Applying national standard 9001:2000 will coordinates public services in a single unit towards unified goals, creating quality of the whole system.
- It contains a standing quality control section which can coordinate and adjust the system as a whole.

4.1.4. Unified "what to do" and "how to work" questions

Under the principle of "good results can only achieved when the process of generating them operates well", the process of providing public services is decisive factor to the results of the quality management systems by national standards ISO 9001:2000.

On contrary, the quality management system by ISO 9001:2000 impacts on the public service providing process by the principle of "Only good results obtained when having good management over the process of producing them".

4.2. Standardized public services can remove the constraints of the quality management system following ISO 9001:2000 standards

According to quality experts, ISO is a top down quality management pattern based on a set of principles, while standardization of public services

includes bottom-up independent activities based on the responsibility, trust and assurance of individuals or group of people doing public services.

ISO promotes the issuance of principles in writing, but neglects the determination of quantitative dimension. Standardization of public services is a combination the strength of every people, units concerned to conduct continuous improvement, accumulating from small to substantive changes.

ISO takes monitoring as a tool for setting up the controller unit and in standardization of public services, the person responsible for quality is not the controller but the product/service producers themselves... depending on specific cases.

The process of standardization of public services is somewhat independent to ISO with the following basic arguments:

- Quality management is the responsibility of every persons and units involved in the system.
- Quality management by standardized public services is a collective activity which requires joint effort of all people concerned.
- Quality management by standardized public services shall obtain high effectiveness if all people together participate in the process.
- ISO only asks some functional units in the agency to take part, other units have little involvement in related parts. It looks simple, easy doing but other units seem to be outside of the game, leading to limited effectiveness.
- Standardization of public services requires quality of integration, effective management of every steps of the work process.
- Operation of quality groups is an integrated part of the integrated quality management.
- Standardization of public services allows us to intercommunicate among administrative agencies but ISO is only applied in a single agency.

4.3. Policy solution of standardized public services in the application of standards ISO 9001:2000

Quality management combined with standardized public services is an approach on quality management in every step with the view to improve general productivity and efficiency of the organization. In spite of different areas the two issues in general pay attention to the quality in all activities, it

shows the understanding, commitment, cooperation of all staff members in the organization, particularly at the management level.

Specific characteristics of this combination as well as its operation can be wrapped up in the 12 key points shown below. This is also the basic procedure for the development of the system:

- *Perception*: It should clearly understand the general concepts, management principles, clearly defined roles and positions in standardized public services;
- *Commitment*: Commitment of leaders, management at different level and the staff as a whole in consistently pursuing quality related programmes and objectives, making it as the most sacred thing of every people whenever they think of their jobs.
- *Organization*: Placing right person in right post, clear work division and responsibility of every individuals.
- *Measurement*: Qualitative assessment on the improvements made, completion of unqualified activities in terms of their quality and expenses caused by these activities.
- *Quality requirements*: To work out objectives, requirements of quality, requirements of application of different aspects of the quality management system.
- *Quality design*: The design of work, product and service is a bridge connecting to the working functions.
- *Quality management system*: To develop quality policy, methodology, procedures and processes for management of the agency's operation and performance.
- *Use of statistical methods*: to monitor processes and the operation of the quality system.
- *Formation of quality groups* as main core for modification and improvement of work/product quality.
- *Collective collaboration* to be established from trust, free opinion exchange and understanding of staff members regarding general objectives and plans which facilitates the intercommunication in public services.
- *Training organised* on regular basis for every staff of the agency on the perception of the concept of quality management as well as necessary skills to do the job assigned.

- *Formulation of implementation plan:* On the basis of the reference manual for combined application of standardized public services and application of quality system according to national standards TCVN 9001:2000, to formulate a plan to implement part by part the assignment in order to get used to the system moving towards the full application.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

In response to the requirements and tasks of the new period of development and in implementation of industrialization and modernization, creating firm premises for entering into market economy, integration, knowledge society, globalization it is very important to conduct studies on assessment of the state management in line with the national standards TCVN ISO 9001:2000.

The application of TCVN ISO 9001:2000 has very strong influence on the state administrative reform.

However, the state management following the national standards TCVN ISO 9001:2000 in Ha Nam province still exposes constraints. It is therefore very indispensable to review the process in order to achieve the objective of making people satisfied with public services.

Technological assessment is a new outlook to reveal weaknesses and shortcomings in prevailing policies. That is in the *Public services provision, Standardized public services* is the solution to the hot problems currently faced by sectors, localities at different levels.

5.2. Recommendations

In order to achieve the objective of making people satisfied with public services following the national standards TCVN ISO 9001:2000, based on the unified application of the ISO standards and the standardization of public services, the author of this paper would like to recommend the following actions to be taken and some solutions as follows:

1) It should revise, amend the application mechanism promulgated in Directive number 02/2007/CT-UBND dated 09 April 2007 and Plan number 277/KH-UBND dated 13 March 2007 of Ha Nam People's Committee concerning the application of Quality management system following Standards TCVN ISO 9001:2000 in Ha Nam province.

Orientation for the revision: Combining the application of Quality management system with the standardization of public services. Assign the

Science and Technology Service in cooperation with the Service of Interior Affairs and other agencies concerned of the province to develop a Proposal on standardization of public services to be submitted to the Provincial People's Committee for approval and promulgation. This can be considered as a scientific task for 2008 and 2009 to integrate it into the application of Standards TCVN ISO 9001:2000 in the state administrative management.

2) It should renew the views, principles, content as well as the pattern of standardization of public services in orientation of the technology as mentioned above in consistency with the objective of making people satisfied with the public services./.

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