

FaR 2021**International Forum “Freedom and responsibility in pivotal times”****ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC SERVICES IN THE
FIELD OF EMPLOYMENT**

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Abstract

The state has long been engaged in evaluating and improving the quality of public services. Users of public services should be actively involved in this process. Currently, this opportunity is provided by the digitalization of the economy. For this purpose, several Internet resources have been developed, telephone and questionnaire surveys, and SMS voting are conducted. This has undoubtedly reduced the time between the provision of services and the assessment of their quality, increased the speed of response to deviations, and as a result, improved the quality of public services. However, the issue of full coverage of the target audience remains unresolved. If public services are evaluated in a large volume, the services provided by municipal institutions are not always evaluated by consumers. The article attempts to assess the quality of services provided by the territorial employment center of the Irkutsk region from the point of view of consumers (unemployed). The purpose of the study is to study the opinion of the consumers and their recommendations to improve the quality of these services in the context of a pandemic, when a state institution operates in a closed format. During the questionnaire survey, interesting conclusions were obtained about the quality of public services. It was revealed that the most popular service of the employment center was social support for the unemployed. The respondents indicated the availability and high level of services provided, and the competence of the staff. The needs of the population that were not fully met were also identified.

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1. Introduction

The problem of assessing the quality of public services forces researchers in different countries to look for approaches to this problem. The authors, for their part, made an attempt to resolve this issue with the involvement of consumers of public services. In the context of the pandemic crisis, many people found themselves using the services of employment centers. Therefore, it is important to assess the quality of work of a territorial employment center when the demand for its services is high.

2. Problem Statement

The relevance of the research topic is due, first, to the deterioration of the situation on the Russian labor market and a sharp increase in unemployment in the context of the spread of a new coronavirus infection. The unemployment rate is considered by many researchers as the most important indicator of the situation on the labor market, and the relationship between falling production volumes and employment is obvious in most developed economies of the world, when employers cannot afford to maintain an excessive labor force (Bylkov & Samarina, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic has put many organizations on the brink of survival, which have had to reduce the number of employees. Changes in employment have affected the sectors of the economy such as public catering, trade, services, in particular, the tourism business, the leisure and entertainment industry, and a number of others. Second, the digitalization of the economy has given the employment service the task of providing public services using information and telecommunications technologies (Bylkov, 2017; Gigas & Shelupanov, 2019), and the coronavirus pandemic has contributed to the faster development of public services in electronic form in the field of employment in Russia. In addition, one of the goals of administrative reform in the Russian Federation is to provide public services in electronic form (Bakhtairova, 2014; Meteleva, 2016). The development of the system of electronic public services is also provided for by a number of regulatory documents. Third, effective public administration is impossible without solving the problem of improving the quality of public services. All these arguments indicate that the task of developing methodological approaches to assessing the results and improving the efficiency of the state employment service, improving the quality of public services in the field of employment is becoming particularly relevant in the Russian Federation.

3. Research Questions

3.1. Approaches to the interpretation of the concept of "quality"

Modern researchers distinguish several milestones in understanding the essence of the category "quality": substrate (inherent in ancient cultures), subject (consideration of things and their properties), system (came with the development of a systematic approach), functional (definition of quality through quantitative indicators), integral (comprehensive coverage of all aspects and factors) (Khachaturov & Kulikov, 2003).

The dictionary of the Russian language by Ozhegov (1990) provides two interpretations of this concept: 1) a set of essential signs, properties, features that distinguish an object or phenomenon from others and give it certainty; 2) a particular property, a feature that determines the dignity of something.

In the modern economic dictionary (Raizberg, 2005), quality is defined as a set of properties, characteristics of products, goods, works, services, and labor that determine their ability to meet the needs and requests of people, meet their purpose and requirements.

The functional understanding of the category "quality" with its inherent laws that make it possible to express quality through quantitative indicators has found a wide application in the practice of production and economic activity and is closely related to various economic processes. For this purpose, many statistical methods have been developed to improve quality, including the construction of Pareto curves, Shewhart control maps, cause and result diagrams, scattering diagrams, and others. It is with the functional understanding of quality that the emergence of such a scientific discipline as qualimetry was associated. This discipline develops methods and studies the problems of complex quantitative assessment of the quality of an object of any nature. According to the founder of qualimetry, Azgaldov (1994), quality is a complex property that includes a set of properties that characterize the results obtained when consuming an object, both positive and negative.

Problems of improving the quality of products occupied an important place in the works of domestic scientists of the socialist period of economic development. However, quality as the degree of compliance of various characteristics of the finished product with requirements and standards was evaluated at that time only from the manufacturer's point of view. Market reforms of the Russian economy and the opening of borders helped to rethink the role of the consumer in assessing the quality of products, executed works, and services rendered. In a market economy, there is a need for an integral understanding of quality with its inherent synthetic, holistic coverage of all its aspects. The modern understanding of the category "quality" necessarily includes a general assessment of the properties of a product or service from the consumer's point of view, taking into account all factors that influence consumer choice.

The quality of an organization's products and services is determined by its ability to satisfy consumers and its deliberate or unintended influence on stakeholders.

Problems of improving the quality of products, goods, works, and services are becoming vital not only for businesses and organizations in the commercial sector. It can be stated that the solution of quality improvement problems currently plays a special role not only in various industries, but also in the social sphere. Achieving a high quality of life for the population largely depends on the development of such socially important sectors as education, health, science, and culture. In turn, the development of the social sphere is impossible without effective public administration.

3.2. Criteria for the quality of public services

Governance in the public service is also subject to changes. Most of the major public service reforms in various countries of the world are related to the development and application of indicators of efficiency and effectiveness of public authorities, improving the quality of public services provided, as well as the introduction of new management methods (Bakhtairova & Derbenev, 2015). Management methods and technologies that have proven themselves in the commercial sphere are being actively implemented in the management practice of state bodies. The traditional bureaucratic management model is being replaced by a new model based on participation management (Gaponenko & Pankrukhin, 2002). Management in the public service under this model should be proactive, aimed not at combating emerging problems, but at

preventing them. The role of a person is also being reinterpreted: he is considered not as a hindrance in the activity, but as a customer, a consumer of services. Management in this case is based not on measuring costs and bureaucratic control, but on measuring results and control by society. This approach requires a more rigorous selection of personnel, continuous training and professional development of employees, stabilization of the team and the creation of project groups to develop effective management solutions. To implement this approach, it is necessary to invest in human capital and develop approaches to assessing the quality of public services and quantifying results (efficiency, effectiveness, savings). In the management system in the public service, total bureaucratic control is replaced by control from the position of the consumer of public service services. In turn, this form of control can be carried out on the basis of establishing feedback with consumers, as well as using the media and involving various public organizations and other interested parties.

Further analysis of the scientific literature on improving the quality of public services led us to the conclusion that solving the problem of quality improvement requires a good material base, qualified and interested personnel, as well as well-established organization of processes and quality management. Introduction of quality management systems (TQM) and general quality control systems (TQC) is considered to be one of the important areas for improving the quality of public services to the population (Okrepilov, 2012; Sokolova & Tarasova, 2017). At the same time, the quality management cycle of public services includes the following elements: planning quality assurance activities, organizing quality assurance activities, monitoring and evaluating the quality of public services, making decisions, and implementing measures to improve the quality of public services (Zemskova, 2020).

Sokolova and Tarasova (2017) also suggest evaluating the quality of state and municipal services in the framework of total quality control in 3 stages. The preparatory stage involves assessing the correctness of regulatory documents, the competence of employees, etc. The production stage is aimed at evaluating the infrastructure of the state institution and the accuracy of the implementation of administrative regulations. The post-implementation stage of the assessment provides for the result of working with claims and offers.

In the study of the quality of state and municipal services, some authors distinguish such methodological approaches as academic, managerial, socially oriented and administrative (Panarina, 2009).

In Russian practice, the assessment of the quality of public services is increasingly focused on standardization. It is assumed that the proper level of quality and accessibility of public services will be ensured by setting standards and regulations for their provision (Klishina, 2007). Standards of public services will set the necessary level of their quality and availability, and administrative regulations will determine the timing and sequence of actions of the executive authority, the order of interaction between its structural divisions and officials in the provision of public services.

The introduction and improvement of standards for the provision of state and municipal services to the population indicates the increased attention of the state to the problems of efficiency of public services. The standard of public service is a set of requirements that is determined, firstly, based on the requests and wishes of customers, and secondly, taking into account the technological, financial, material and technical and other resource limitations of the state body (Kayl, 2010). Academician Okrepilov (2012) writes that the existing system for analyzing the performance of public administration bodies is slightly focused on the

opinion of direct consumers of public services. Performance assessment does not allow us to identify the opinion of consumers of services. It should be emphasized that for a more complete assessment of consumer opinions, not only quantitative, but also qualitative information is needed. In addition, the opinion of consumers should be differentiated by socio-demographic groups, territories, and types of services. Equally important in the analysis is the study of consumer expectations and their requirements for the quality of a particular public service.

When evaluating the quality of services, regardless of their type, the following criteria are most often used by consumers (Kozlenko, 2008): accessibility (the ability to get a service in a convenient place, without time spent waiting); competence (the staff has the necessary knowledge and skills); courtesy (respect and care on the part of employees); sociability; trust (employees strive to meet various requests of service recipients); responsiveness; reliability (services are provided consistently); security (services do not threaten the safety of the client); understanding (the desire to understand the client's requests as best as possible, to pay attention to each one); tangibility.

In accordance with the decree of the Government of the Russian Federation, No. 1284 of December 12, 2012, the quality of public services is assessed according to the following criteria:

- time of provision of the evaluated services;
- waiting time in the queue;
- courtesy and competence of the employee;
- comfort conditions in the room where the services are provided;
- availability of information about the procedure for providing services (Russian Federation, No. 1284, 2012).

If services are provided in the electronic form, the evaluation uses the following criteria: the availability of information on the procedure of granting of services in the electronic form; the time of filing the application and providing valued services; convenience procedures for the granting of estimated services (appointments, filing, awareness of the applicant about the provision of services as a result of the provision of services).

Taking into account the fact that today most state institutions provide services through a hotline, you can include in the assessment the criteria such as politeness and competence of the employee, thanks to which you can evaluate professional qualities.

Currently, much attention is paid to such subjects of quality control as the population, business, and public organizations. In their early works, the authors came to the conclusion that when assessing the quality of services provided, in particular, by employment services, it is necessary to take into account the opinion of consumers of services (Nosyreva & Beloborodova, 2020). Therefore, the object of this study is to assess the quality of services provided by the territorial employment center of the Irkutsk region by consumers. We tried to study the opinion of consumers and their recommendations for improving the quality of these services in the context of a pandemic, when employment centers of large cities of the Irkutsk region operate in a closed format.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose is to evaluate the quality of services provided by the territorial employment center of the Irkutsk region by consumers; to study the opinion of consumers and their recommendations for improving the quality of these services in the context of a pandemic, when employment centers of large cities of the Irkutsk region operate in a closed format.

5. Research Methods

Consumers of employment services are primarily the unemployed. In the context of the pandemic and the massive economic problems associated with the suspension of organizations, the unemployed were the first category of users who could assess the quality of public services in the field of employment. Therefore, we conducted a survey of the population who applied for services in one of the territorial divisions of the employment service of the Irkutsk region. The study was conducted using a questionnaire survey, which was attended by 82 people.

6. Findings

The pandemic has made major changes in people's lives (figure 01). 94% of respondents indicated that they lost their jobs, and another 9% first transferred to remote work with subsequent dismissal. This led to a reduction in social contacts (28% of respondents indicated a lack of communication). 63% noted a decline in income. People also began to value official employment, as evidenced by 21% of responses. Respondents also noted complications in life such as illnesses, divorce, and the closure of kindergartens.

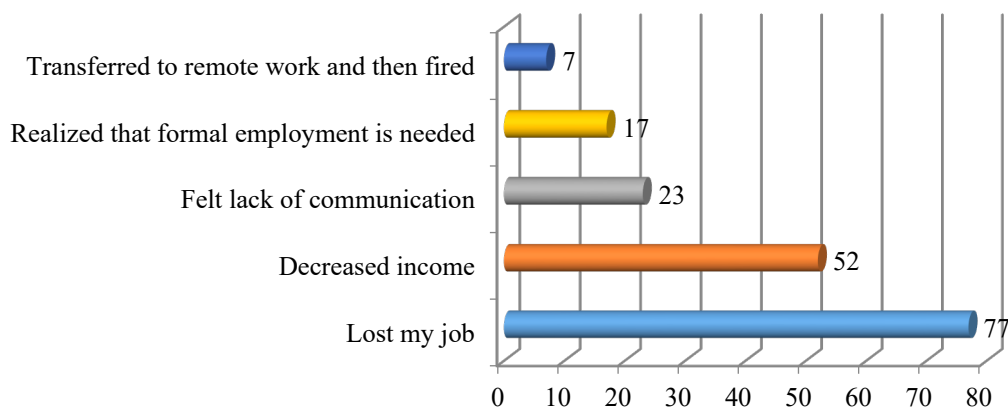


Figure 1. What has changed in your life during the pandemic, (number of respondents surveyed)

Given the difficult situation with the development of the epidemiological situation, we found out what goals were pursued by those who applied to the employment service. The main tasks of this state institution are assistance in employment and self-employment, career guidance and vocational training, registration of benefits and social benefits. However, the most popular service of the employment center was psychological assistance. The main goal of the appeal for 77% of respondents was to get social support.

The ability to speak out, express their emotions and relax has become one of the main needs of citizens during the period of cuts and rising unemployment (figure 02).

33% of respondents applied for information about the conditions for granting benefits, as well as the necessary documents. 26% of applicants wanted to get information about vacancies, opportunities for retraining and starting their own business.

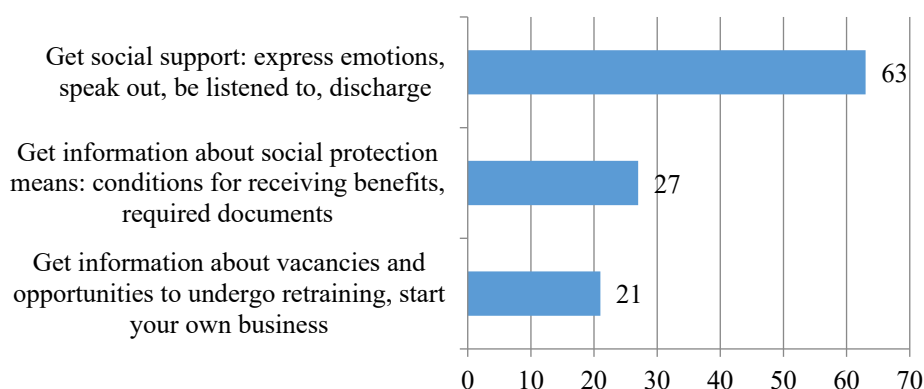


Figure 2. Purpose of applying to the employment service (number of respondents)

In connection with the announcement of a general quarantine, all employment services were switched to remote operation. You can register as an unemployed person, apply for unemployment benefits, get advice or necessary information only online: on the website of a state institution or by calling the hotline. Answering the question "was the information on the website of the employment service useful and are you interested in filling the portal "Work in Russia"?", 81% of respondents gave a negative answer. 17% of respondents did not access these resources at all. Only 2% indicated that they were satisfied with the work of the portal (figure 03).

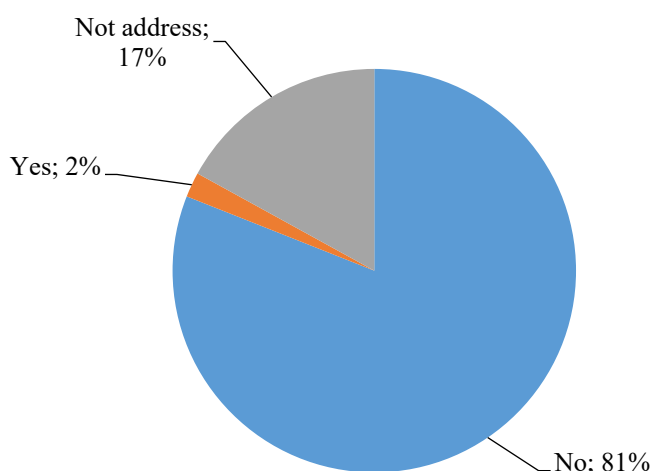


Figure 3. Are you satisfied with the work of the portal "Work in Russia"?

We can conclude that the majority of applicants either did not find the necessary information on the sites, or did not try to search, so they indicated that it was missing. However, you should pay attention to the content of Internet portals.

To the question "how quickly did you get through to the employment service?" 77% answered quickly, 23% had difficulties in dialing and waited a long time for an answer. Given the high demand from the unemployed, this is understandable. However, it should be noted that the existence of a waiting period for receiving public services in the field of employment is one of the factors that reduce the quality of services.

As suggestions for improving the work of the employment service, the unemployed expressed the following suggestions (table 01).

Table 1. Suggestions for improving the work of the employment service

Suggestions	Number of respondents who answered
Receive benefits on time	7
Open the required vacancies	4
Improve site performance	3
Increase the amount of the benefit	1
Extend the payment of benefits	1
Implement an individual approach to the provision of services	1
Open an employment service	1
Thank you for the Employment Center	1
Take training courses for a new profession	1

*compiled by the authors based on the materials of a sociological survey

The suggestions made by respondents do not always relate to the quality of public services. They are more likely to express the general wishes of the unemployed to increase benefits or extend their payment. 9% of respondents indicated a desire to receive benefits on time. This is due to the fact that there was a delay in the payment of unemployment benefits, which occurred for reasons beyond the control of the employment service, so the quality of services does not affect.

The concern is that job seekers need more suitable vacancies (5% of respondents indicated this problem). Naturally, highly qualified specialists are often not satisfied with the offers available in the employment service. Most often, these are working professions that do not meet the expectations of such specialists.

4% of respondents were in favor of improving the performance of websites. This indicates that the information content of the portals is not sufficiently developed or there is no necessary information on them.

At the same time, the wish of the employment service's clients to implement an individual approach to the provision of services directly relates to the problem of the quality of public services in the field of employment. However, it should be noted that when providing an employee with the employment service is not only in a strict time frame, but in the framework of the administrative regulations, and in accordance with the provisions of the law "On employment in RF". Therefore, additional study of the needs of different groups of clients in an individual approach is required.

The next stage of the study was to assess the competence of employment service employees on the part of service consumers.

93% of respondents rated the competence of employment service employees at a high level, and 7% at a good level. Thus, all respondents included in the sample noted that specialists have information and were able to provide it upon request.

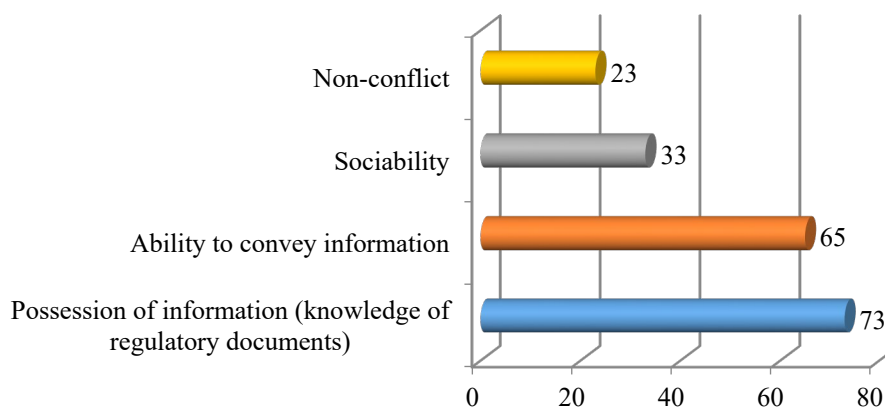


Figure 4. What qualities do employees of the employment center possess, % of respondents

Assessing the personal and professional qualities of employees of the employment center, users noted non-conflict and sociability, possession of information and the ability to convey it (Figure 04). Moreover, 73% of respondents noted their competence in professional matters and knowledge of regulatory documents, while another 65% indicated their ability to correctly convey information to users. They also noted the qualities of employees of the state employment service such as goodwill and ability to provide support, which is proof of the high qualification level of employees in the provision of public services.

High ratings of employees' professionalism once again confirm a fairly high level of quality of services provided by the employment center. This fact is confirmed by the answers to the question about the quality of public services: 99% of users gave a positive review, rating it excellent (only 1 Respondent rated the quality of public services satisfactorily).

7. Conclusion

The quality of public services of the territorial employment center of the Irkutsk region can be assessed at a high level, as evidenced by the results of the study among the unemployed. 99% of respondents are satisfied with the quality of services received. This is also quite consistent with the indicator of satisfaction with the quality of public services, which currently stands at 96.6%.

Employees are competent, have all the necessary information and are able to convey it correctly (73% and 65%, respectively). In addition, specialists show important professional qualities such as non-conflict, benevolence, and the ability to provide support.

However, the content of Internet portals such as "Work in Russia" and "Irkzan" does not fully meet the needs of users. There is also concern about the speed of dialing the hotline, which can be solved by

increasing the number of hotline employees during peak hours. Thus, the territorial employment center fully fulfills its functions and meets the requests of the citizens who applied. Therefore, its work can be evaluated as fully satisfying the customer's requirements.

As for the authors' recommendations on further improving the quality of public services in the field of employment, the following key areas can be identified: improving the material base of the state employment service; measures to increase psychological competence and develop staff motivation (employees working on the hotline during the pandemic experience increased psychoemotional loads, stress); improving standards and administrative regulations; implementation of consumer satisfaction monitoring systems adapted to the specifics of the state employment service.

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