

YOU CAN'T MANAGE WHAT YOU CAN'T CONTROL, AND YOU CAN'T CONTROL WHAT YOU CAN'T MEASURE¹

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Received:
December 13, 2022

Revised:
February 1, 2023

Accepted:
February 17, 2023

DOI:
10.56289/ijcsrp.192

ABSTRACT

Improving the quality and accessibility of public services for the populace is a cornerstone of government policy in public administration. To gauge the effectiveness and efficiency of related strategies, government programs, and projects, central government bodies and local governments—as their official drafters and implementers—employ monitoring and assessment of public service quality. With the "Law on Public Services" having been in effect for several years, it is timely to draw conclusions. This article examines problematic aspects of public service quality control and proposes potential solutions.

Keywords: *monitoring, public service, quality control, digitalisation of public services, certification of public services, service recipient.*

INTRODUCTION

Visitors to the website of the "National Centre of Expertise and Certification" of the Republic of Kazakhstan are greeted with the phrase: "You can't manage what you can't control, and you can't control what you can't measure." This echoes Vitaly Antoshchenko's (2016) insight from "Wow! Service," where he states: "*Management theory says: you can't manage what you can't describe and measure. Therefore, it is important to find a definition of Service that is as simple as possible, that even a child could easily understand, and that would give energy and incentive to manage people and companies.*" This sentiment underscores the critical need to monitor and determine process effectiveness for sound management and decision-making.

This article aims to delve into the actual process of managing public service quality in the Republic of Kazakhstan, exploring its legal framework and the often-hidden nuances of its implementation. It emphasises that effective control—and thus effective management—hinges entirely on what can be measured.

What is a public service?

The concept of public services officially entered circulation in Kazakhstan in 2007, through amendments and additions to the Republic of Kazakhstan Law of November 27, 2000, "On Administrative Procedures." This marked the formal recognition of citizens' and other subjects' right to access public services. As Baimakhanov (2013) notes, "Previously, such a right was not proclaimed in our country, since there were no rudiments and a system of its legal regulation. Therefore, speaking in legal language, it became the object of primary law-making, and legal regulation of the use of public services began 'from scratch,' without the experience of a previous regulatory framework due to its absence."

A public service, as defined by Article 1 of the Law "On Public Services," is a form of implementing individual public functions. These services are delivered on an individual basis,

¹ National Center for Expertise and Certification <https://naceks.kz/nevozmozhno-upravlyat-tem-chto-nelzya-kontrolirovat-i-nevozmozhno-kontrolirovat-to-chto-nelzya-izmerit/>

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either upon request or unsolicited, to recipients, aiming to realise their rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests, and to provide them with appropriate material or non-material benefits.

Over the years of developing the public services institutions, Kazakhstan has increased the variety of services offered and enhanced the mechanisms for their delivery, control, and certification. As of February 2, 2023, the register of public services provided to individuals and legal entities lists 129 distinct types.³ Looking ahead, authorised bodies responsible for public service development in Kazakhstan plan to digitise over 90% of these services. Furthermore, by 2025, there are plans to introduce an AI-powered consultant in self-service areas.⁴

Control over public service

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, control over the public service quality is exercised in accordance with the approved Rules of State Control over the Quality of Provision of Public Services.

A significant milestone in public service delivery was the launch of the egov.kz web portal in 2006, which has since garnered high international and national recognition. Kazakhstan's e-government development is widely acknowledged as highly successful, earning an "emerging leader" rating (Medeubaeva, 2021). Notably, in the 2023 Global E-Government Development Index compiled by the UN, Kazakhstan secured 28th place among 194 countries worldwide, and an impressive 8th place in the online services category.⁵

The ongoing digitalisation process within government agencies not only enables the swift resolution of numerous critical issues related to public service quality but also significantly decreases corruption and bureaucracy. This is achieved by eliminating direct contact with civil servants through the automation of business processes and by facilitating increased public oversight over service provision procedures.

Furthermore, the transition to digital public services has yielded substantial financial benefits. In 2023 alone, automation and the reduction of personnel involved in process administration resulted in state budget savings exceeding 360 million tenge.⁶

Even with a high degree of digitalisation, not all recipients of electronic services are satisfied with the quality of online public services, as revealed by an independent joint study by SAP and EY (Medeubaeva, 2021). This study specifically analysed citizen satisfaction with service quality and portal usability, identifying which services users considered highest and lowest quality, what hindered their online use of public services, and how they generally assessed various types of digital government services.

To effectively control and evaluate the public service quality, it is essential to monitor their provision's effectiveness. The results of such monitoring are crucial for making informed management decisions regarding the development of public services.

³ Register of public services <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/kgd-vko/documents/details/437490?lang=ru>

⁴ <https://primeminister.kz/ru/news/sovremennyye-resheniya-dlya-povysheniya-kachestva-okazaniya-gosuslug-vnedryayut-v-kazahstane-29878>

⁵ https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/na-kakom-meste-kazahstan-v-mirovom-reytinge-tsifrovizatsii-496139/

⁶ Skol'ko byudzhetnyh sredstv udalos' sekonomit' v 2023 godu blagodarya cifrovizatsii gosuslug [How much budget funds were saved in 2023 thanks to the digitalization of public services], <https://www.nur.kz/politics/kazakhstan/2049189-skolko-byudzhetnyh-sredstv-udalos-sekonomit-v-2023-godu-blagodarya-tsifrovizatsii-gosuslug/>

How to measure public services?

Assessing the effectiveness and public service quality involves activities designed to determine how well measures providing citizens with accessible and high-quality services are working. This process is governed by Chapter 5 of the Law "On Public Services." This legal framework allows for assessing citizens' trust in the state, the population's positive expectations, and the extent of support for socio-economic and socio-political reforms being implemented across the country.

Since 2014, Kazakhstan has annually conducted public monitoring of the public service quality. The purpose of this monitoring is to ascertain the level of satisfaction among service recipients concerning the quality, accessibility, and procedures for public service provision by service providers. It also aims to identify problematic issues, develop recommendations for improving the public service quality, and detect instances of bureaucracy and red tape.⁷ The Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Civil Service Affairs organises this public monitoring.

In 2023, the public monitoring of public service quality assessments revealed an average score of 4.70 out of a maximum of 5 points, with a 77.3% satisfaction level among service recipients.⁸ The overall rating for public services in 2023 encompassed 49 out of the 50 services designated for public monitoring.

When assessing the public service quality, the following factors are considered:

- *Availability*: this includes metrics such as the number of users accessing services via electronic service portals, mobile applications, or other platforms;
- *Recipient satisfaction*: this is gauged through public monitoring initiatives where individuals and non-profit organisations gather and analyse data on service quality, subsequently developing recommendations for improvement;
- *Automation*: this factor assesses the degree to which services are automated and provided through a "one-stop-shop" approach;
- *Grounds for refusal*: it is crucial to ascertain that any refusal to provide a service is based on valid regulatory grounds;
- *List of basic requirements*: this covers essential aspects such as service provision methods, delivery times, required forms, expected results, and payment amounts.

This brings us to the crucial question of the competence required by those who will manage, control, monitor, and evaluate the provision and public service quality.

Certification of public services

Certification, in this context, refers to the official confirmation that a public service provider's services comply with the laws, standards, and regulations of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In 2016, Kazakhstan established the 'Government for Citizens' State Corporation, a public service provider operating on a "one-stop-shop" principle to serve individuals and legal entities.⁹ To

⁷ Report on the results of public monitoring of the quality of provision of state services [Report on the results of public monitoring of the public service quality],

<https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/qyzmet/documents/details/596391?lang=ru>

⁸ Ditto

⁹ <https://gov4c.kz/ru/about/obshchaya-informatsiya/>

ensure continuous service delivery, 70 branches and one representative office of this State Corporation have been established across Kazakhstan's regions.

Its main goal is to optimise internal processes, ensure the security of certified public services, reduce complaints and comments on the work of employees, and improve the quality of service to recipients. This also aims to increase the competitiveness of public services provided across various areas of activity.

In 2019, the State Corporation "Government for Citizens" underwent international certification of public services, achieving compliance with the ISO 9000 series quality management standards¹⁰. The principles of this international quality management system standard have been implemented in the State Corporation's operations. A certification audit for compliance with ISO 9001:2015 requirements was conducted, which enables the State Corporation to continuously improve its business processes, digitalise public services, reduce queues at public service centres, enhance corporate and service culture, and develop employee competence.

Currently, Kazakhstan faces several key challenges in managing the public service qualities:

- Lack of clear quality assessment criteria: As Panova (2011) notes, consumers need to understand the criteria to properly assess if a service was delivered correctly and met quality standards.
- Low qualifications and occasional incompetence among employees: This is a significant contributor to poor public service quality.¹¹
- Insufficient public awareness regarding service procedures and appeal processes.

Moreover, practical experience indicates that implementing public oversight is the most effective method for controlling the public service quality provision (Mukashev, 2012). This can involve engaging public organisations to conduct quality control through social surveys, "mystery shopper" techniques, and other tools. It's also crucial to conduct public awareness campaigns.

CONCLUSION

Public monitoring results confirm the importance of quantitative indicators such as trust in the service provider and the competence of employees delivering public services. These factors are closely correlated with satisfaction levels regarding public service quality.

Recipient trust in a service provider is higher when there is:

- 1) Complete, clear, and reliable information that is accessible and open;
- 2) Modern technological support for information reception, transmission, and communication;
- 3) An organisationally flexible, customer-oriented structure capable of prompt decision-making;
- 4) Stable, prompt, and clear feedback that the recipient understands. Ignoring complaints or providing unhelpful "pat answer" type responses is unacceptable.

¹⁰ [Kyzylorda-news.kz, https://oldru.kyzylorda-news.kz/news/lifnews/25437-goskorporaciya-proshla-mezhdunarodnuyu-sertifikaciyu-gosuslug.html](https://oldru.kyzylorda-news.kz/news/lifnews/25437-goskorporaciya-proshla-mezhdunarodnuyu-sertifikaciyu-gosuslug.html)

¹¹ Kak provoditsya profilaktika narushenij v sfere okazaniya gosudarstvennyh uslug [How is prevention of violations in the provision of public services carried out?], <https://www.nur.kz/society/2049289-kak-provoditsya-profilaktika-narusheniy-v-sfere-okazaniya-gosudarstvennyh-uslug/>

Modern trends in public service quality management are increasingly becoming a crucial mechanism for improving public administration in Kazakhstan. The imperative to integrate new technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the digitalisation of public services inevitably necessitates restructuring of the entire public administration process, focusing on the service recipient's needs to ensure high-quality delivery.

As noted, "to achieve this effect, it is not enough to call a function a process or apply the description of processes only to the provision of public services. It is necessary to reformat all the activities of the organisation with a focus on the result - meeting the requirements of the consumer."¹² (While a discussion on the leading role of business processes over government functions in public administration would be relevant here, it falls outside the scope of this article.)

In my opinion, the commitment of senior management to continuous improvement is the decisive condition for successfully implementing and realising public service quality policy in Kazakhstan.

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¹² Analytical review "Certain aspects of public administration transformation: processes and quality" Center for Strategic Research (CSR), p. 46 <https://www.csr.ru/ru/research/gosupravlenie-budushhego-rulyat-protsessy-a-ne-funktsii/>