

# IMPROVEMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE IN BULGARIA - MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES, MODELS AND PROBLEMS

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**Abstract:** *Improving the administrative service and providing quality public services in a transparent, efficient and effective way is one of the main goals of the administrative reform in Bulgaria. To achieve this goal, many strategies, concepts and models have been adopted at national level over the years. Their implementation in practice has highlighted the need for a radical change in the governance style of public administration. The aim of the study is to clarify the crucial role of the operations function of public institutions in this change through the application of successful business administration models in the management of administrative services delivery processes.*

The administrative reform in Bulgaria has posed some important targets and tasks before the Public Administration. To improve the administrative service and to provide quality public services in a transparent, efficient and effective way is one of the main targets before the administrative reform. In order to achieve this, a few number of strategies, concepts and models have been accepted on a national level over the years. Their in accomplishment into practice has outlined the necessity of a deep change in the style of governing the public administration.

This research aims to clarify the critically important role of the operational function of the public institutions, part of that change, by applying some successful models from the business administration into the governance of the processes of providing administrative services.

So as to achieve this, in the present paper, a brief overview of the basic government documents has been made, where the strategic goals in the sphere of administrative service of the citizens and the business in the last fifteen years are set, their level at which they could be achieved and the main tasks which the administration has to solve in that respect until the year 2020. The operational function, especially the one of the working processes for solving the problems in the administrative services has been outlined. Several useful approaches and instruments from the business administration have been suggested and also some conclusions have been made regarding their

applicability in order to improve the processes in the provided administrative services for the clients.

***Strategic documents, defining the guidelines in the modern development of the administrative service in Republic of Bulgaria and the role of the processes for providing administrative services to reach their goals.***

During the last fifteen years, which cover the period before and after the accession of Bulgarian to the European Union, a number of strategies, models and plans to achieve the strategies have been adopted, each targeting the successful development of the public administration. Only for a period of six years, from 2007 to 2013, 550 strategic documents have been developed and approved, 210 of them on a national level. [12]

Among this great variety of documents, the number of the ones related to the optimization and modernization of the processes for providing administrative services is rather limited. The following could be mentioned in chronological order:

- Basic model of "one stop shop" administrative service, adopted with Decision № 878 of the Council of Ministers from 2002. [2]
- Basic model of complex administrative service, adopted with Decision of the Council of Ministers from 19th June 2013. [3]
- Methodology for improving the working processes for providing administrative services, adopted with Decision of the Council of Ministers from 30th September 2013. [9]
- Public Administration Development Strategy 2014-2020, adopted with Decision №140 of the Council of Ministers from 17th March 2014. [12]
- E-governance development strategy-2014 – 2020 in the Republic of Bulgaria, adopted with Decision №163 of the Council of Ministers from 21st March 2014. [5]
- Action Plan for implementing the Strategy for the period 2014-2015, adopted with Decision №302 of the Council of Ministers from 15th May 2014. [1]
- Road Map for implementing the Strategy for the period 2015-2020, adopted by the Administrative Reform Council in January 2015. [13]
- Report on Action Plan for implementing the Strategy for the period 2014-2015, adopted with Protocol №431 of the Council of Ministers from 19th October 2016. [14]

Each of the listed documents contributes to guiding the administrative reform into track in order to be conducted. Every other contribution builds up and adds in logical order the previous models. What appears to be the problem is that the introduction of the principles and the practices, the fulfillment of the main tasks, which they contain does not happen fast enough, comprehensively and ubiquitously in the administrative institutions thus meeting the expectations of the society.

What the current research focuses on is how far the operational function has been covered in them and especially in the working processes so as to achieve effectiveness, efficiency and quality of the administrative services.

In relation to that, the role of “Concept for improving the administrative service in the context of the principle “one stop shop” and “The basic model for administrative service at “one stop shop” should be noted and which have been adopted in 2002 by the Council of Ministers. [2] These documents initiated the change towards a new organisational culture of the institutions in the public sector, without which the complex administrative service and the electronic governance were unthinkable. In the model, four consecutive phases of development have been set in time for the administrative service system as the final goal is to provide complex services of the type “phases of life” . The phases set a frame to expand the potential which is necessary to provide complex services and it includes:

- Phase 1: Provision of services by a separate administrative structure within the system of one ministry.
- Phase 2: Integration of the provided services by separate administrative structures within the system of one ministry.
- Phase 3: Integration of the provided services by two separate administrative structures from the system of different ministries.
- Phase 4: Provision of services by multiple administrative structures under the form of the type “phases of life”.

In order to reach the final phase in the development of the system for administrative service it was necessary to start and go through the previous ones. The level of progress was dependent on the specific features of every separate administration, but the basic line of the model was to meet the necessities of the customers of the administrative services through the easiest, the most accessible and rewarding for them way.

Before anticipating any practical actions for providing complex administrative services, it was necessary to assess the level that had been reached at each phase, which differs for the different administrative structures. The model for administrative service lying on the principle "one stop shop" laid down the necessity of evaluation of the defined as “ levers of change” - processes, human resources, technologies and governance of the

activity. Each of those targeted spheres is directly related to the decisions in the function of operations. They build the basis, round which the improvement of the administrative service should be structured in order to achieve the phase of complex administrative service. The problem lies in the fact that the level of development is different and many of the administrations could not reach the goals set in 2002, could not apply in practice and thoroughly the strategic principles for the provision of administrative services and establish effective working systems for “one stop shop” service, which is evident from the analysis made in the Basic model of complex administrative service in 2013 [3].

It should be noted that the concept and the model triggered several positive changes in the organisation of the work and the organisational culture of the Bulgarian public institutions in harmony with the European achievements in that sphere. The analysis of the achievements gained after introducing “one stop shop” model allows some positive findings to be made, such as:

- As in the management of the business services, the client and their expectations and requests have been put in the center of the model of administrative service.

- The working processes have become subject of some analysis, description, evaluation, measurement of the result and improvement. In the operational structure of the public institutions “front offices” and “back offices” have been differentiated and some attempts have been made to draw lines between their limits and responsibilities as well as the mechanisms of interaction between them. This has allowed a better evaluation of the available and necessary capacity of the administration and the improvement in the utilization of the resources.

- One of the most important merits of the “one stop shop” model for administrative service is that it has presented the administration with an action plan where the tasks for accomplishment, the critical factors for success and criteria for measuring the results have been clearly outlined. It was used as an attempt to introduce a mechanism for a constant improvement of the activities of the administration.

The frame of the phases for development has been used in the strategic documents that followed [3,12, 13] as a basis to assess the level of expansion of the potential of the administrations to introduce a complex administrative service and e-governance. The concept has been withdrawn when the Public Administration Development Strategy (2014-2020) was adopted, but it also has triggered several necessary changes. For the first time the importance of the working processes to achieve effectiveness, efficiency and quality in administration services has been considered as valuable. The need for

optimisation and re-engineering of the processes has been justified, as one of the prerequisites for the introduction and development of a complex administrative service and e-governance in Bulgaria.

Another strategic document, which relates to this sphere of the researched issues is “Basic model of complex administrative service (CAS)”. The model has been developed as a response to the necessity of a universal frame and guidelines for the introduction of a complex administrative service in the state administration. The main goal of the model has been to present a complete methodology for practical introduction of CAS and dissemination of the experience in that field form other existing good practices in other state-members of the EU, in order to facilitate and encourage the administration in Bulgaria to complete this necessary, for the continuation of the administrative reform, step. The necessity of such a document has been justified in the context of the current state of the administrative service, where, after ten years of work on the Concept for service at “one stop shop”, a delay and some problems related to fulfilling the conditions and the creation of the necessary environment for implementing the complex administrative service have been found. What was pointed out in the analysis of the current state of the administrative service towards 2013, was the following: [3]

- real existing difficulties in the communication, integration and co-ordination between the different administrative structures in the state when providing services to the citizens and the business;
- low level of automatization of the processes for providing administrative services - around 30% of the administrations declared that they provide electronic services, where the biggest share is limited only to given access to electronic forms of documents and information;
- the services that allow electronic processing of documents or making transactions in electronic way are with merely 5% relative share;
- the exchange of data and documents between the departments, which create and maintain registers with primary information is obstructed due to clumsy procedures and limited communication;
- it is a well-established practice in the administration to refer to the maximum deadlines, established by law for providing services without making the necessary efforts to eliminate the losses and reduce the time for fulfilling the processes, which directly influences the clients’ satisfaction and the effectiveness of the administrative services;
- services, which need the integration of several administrations or services of the type “business events” and “phases of life” are not provided.

From operational point of view „Basic model of complex administrative service“ is the assignment of specific tasks to the institutions in the public administration such as :

- to specify and unify the necessary set of documents, information and/or evidence for which there is available data in the administrative authorities, as well the processes of their collection;
- to define and analyse the working processes for production of the services in the administration, which accepts an order for service, the moments and way of interaction with other administrations in the due course of its realisation;
- to suggest measures for improving the working processes in order to increase their effectiveness ;

In order to facilitate the solution of those tasks the model has been completed with „Methodology for improving the working processes for providing administrative services“ [9], which offers some possible approaches and techniques for optimisation and re-engineering of the processes. The methodology and the handbook for its application are practically oriented and this makes them very useful in order to improve the processes for providing of administrative services. The aim is to create “one unified approach which applies the principles of the process-oriented governance of the public administration at a central and local level through a description and analysis of the working processes for providing administrative services”. [9]

The methodology is operationally oriented and is an instrument consisting of various potential applications - for description, analysis and improvement of the working processes, for performing benchmarking on the processes within the limits of one or more administrations, for ensuring correspondence between the written documents and the practices for fulfilling the processes in reality , for training staff who perform the optimisation processes, for implementing internationally recognised quality standards. And as a natural result deriving from these applications - the implementation of a complex administrative service in the public administration.

In 2014 “Public Administration Development Strategy (2014-2020)” was created and adopted as a basic strategic document of national importance for the new programme period. [12] It has been developed in accordance with “The National Programme for Development: Bulgaria 2020” and is targeting the fulfillment of priority 6 “Strengthening the Institutional Environment for Greater Efficiency of Public Services for the Citizens and Business.” [10] The strategy contains the basic recommendations made by the European Commission, the World Bank, and other international institutions, the business and the non-governmental organisations in Bulgaria, for improving the governance.

The Strategy as well as the „Report on Action Plan for implementing the Strategy for the period 2014-2015“ contain analysis with criticism about the state of the administration where, regarding the development of the administrative service, some worrying findings are made: [12,14]

- In the last few years a delay in the development of the administrative service and reaching the set goals has been registered;

- only 1/4 of the administrations declare that they apply the principle of office collection of documents, and 1/3 provide electronic services.

- The principle of “one stop shop” has been introduced in 76.6% of all 517 administrations.

- The administrative service in the country is fragmented and practically a complex administrative service does not exist.

- Integrated services, services from the type “phases of life” and “business events”, that should be provided by several administrations are not introduced.

Based on the analysis of the state of the administrative service in the Strategy and the „Road Map for implementing the Strategy for the period 2015-2020“ [14] some important conclusions have been formulated and some actions have been outlined, which are necessary to meet the challenges and the problems facing the Bulgarian administration during the programme period. One of the strategic targets is to improve the processes of providing administrative services. In order to achieve them the administrations will be supported while performing optimisation and re-engineering of the working processes when providing administrative services based on one unified methodology. The provision of “one stop shop” services by the administrations will be developed further by introducing better optimisation models for the provision of the services. [12]

Modeling of the working processes of the administrative services as a condition needed for the transition of providing quality electronic services is a main task, included in the E-governance development strategy-2014 – 2020 in the Republic of Bulgaria, [5]

As a consequence from the review that has been made here and the analysis of strategic documents, which are deeply related to problem that has been researched, the following conclusions could be made:

- The working processes are the core of the administrative services regardless of the technology and the level of automatisation, which are used for their completion. They build the connection and interaction between all resources (information, employees, registers, etc.) and users of the services.

- The accent on the necessity for optimisation of the processes, which is made in the strategic documents, is a prerequisite to achieve both the goals of the administrative reform, related to effectiveness, efficiency and quality of the administrative services and the introduction of a complex administrative service and electronic governance.

- The definitions about the essence of the working processes, approaches and instruments for their description and optimisation, which are presented in the documents that have been considered, are adopted from the experience in the business administration. Moreover, it would be useful to add some theoretical and practical solutions and models, tested in the business.

***Possibilities to apply instruments from the business administration to describe and optimise the working processes in the administrative services.***

The administrative services are characterised by their great variety of activities, tasks and procedures in the process of their provision, which defines the diversity of the working processes themselves. The list of the unified titles of administrative services in Bulgaria contains 2200 services, provided by the administrations at a central and local level. If to complete non-complex administrative services an individualized, customized process is used, that would generate a loss in terms of time and labor. At the same time, completing a complex service which requires flexibility and specific professional knowledge and competence, with standard routine process would affect the quality of the service. In order to avoid the loss of resources, repetitions of procedures, problems with the quality, the business administration uses different classification schemes and matrices, which allow the differentiation of the processes according to the characteristics, which are important for their fulfillment.[7,16] The different types of processes require the application of different approaches and instruments to describe and optimise them.

In that respect, before choosing an instrument which could describe one working process of an administrative service, it is suitable to assess its basic features, which could enhance the right choice. Suitable indexes, which are known in the business administration to differentiate the types of processes are: The participation of the client in the activities, the level of standardization/customization, repetition of the process per time unit and etc. Another essential prerequisite to choose a suitable instrument for description and optimization of the processes is to have a clear view on the problems, which it is expected to solve - whether it is a loss of resources, low productivity, full use of staff's skills, not enough co-ordination between the participating parties, etc.

In the enterprises, which produce material but lately in the industry of services, the useful for description and optimisation of the working processes

tool is the Lean tool. Some authors support the statement that modern production is built on the basis of the Lean concept. [4] From the specialised literature sources, [8,15,16] a number of definitions and interpretations are known to be based on the Lean principles and the benefits from the adoption of the concept as a complete philosophy of management. Lean could be defined as one whole, which includes the knowledge and instruments, used by the organisation to let free all activities, which the organisation uses in the process of production, but which do not create an added value for the clients of its products. What makes her attractive and applicable in public services are the various intelligent methods, techniques, instruments, which it contains as well as its principles and opportunities: Teeuwen [16] supports the statement that: “Important basic principles of the Lean program include:

- Putting the customer center stage
- Adding value for the customer
- Making wastes visible and eliminating them
- Aiming for your employees to own the processes
- Making your employees champions

Lean is very useful in the public sector if it is aspires to these principles.”

In his research Teeuwen justifies the opportunities and the big advantages for the clients of the public administration and the whole society by applying the concept in order to achieve better governance. By analysing the above interpretation of the essence of Lean, it could be concluded that these principle moments with their content are laid down in the strategic documents which have been discussed in the first part. The concept offers several techniques and instruments for description and visualization of the current state of the working processes as well as the future optimised versions, which is one of the important tasks, marked down in the strategic documents. In the administrative services, the visualisation of the working processes is explained with the high level of intangibility. But also with the necessity to find out the sources of loss in these non-material, and often happening in the employees’ conscience or in the information system, working processes or in part of them.

The visualisation of the processes through the development of viewable documents (maps, charts, diagrams, tables) is known in the literature as „mapping” [6,8,11,15] and it is not an instrument used in Lean concept only. As mentioned before, the choice of an instrument should be done after taking into consideration various factors as: the type of the process depending on the client’s participation, its place in the hierarchy of the business processes in the organisation, the necessary level of going into detail, the aim of the description and the re-engineering of the process and other. The subject of

this research are the working processes. To fulfill the governance needs of this level in the hierarchy of the business processes of one organisation, Lean offers a few instruments. Part of them are aimed to describe the flow of the process of service and the flow of value, which includes added value for clients and losses. The most widely applied are: value stream maps – VSM, process observation, process flowcharts, time value maps, value-add charts, which present the distribution of value between the separate tasks in the process and the movement of the production, service blueprint plan, Swim-line maps, transport charts, etc.[6,8,11, 15,16]. This wide variety of techniques makes it possible to describe the process, which is based on facts and key data. This allows the main problems such as delays, expectations, repetitions of the separate tasks and procedures, something intermittent in the flow of the process and others, which lead to losses, to be identified. The future improved processes could be described with the same instruments.

What is specific about their usage in the practice of the administrative services is that the content of the working processes and the deadlines for their completion on a large scale are defined by law beforehand. In many cases the observations show that the strict adherence to the requirements of the normative documents regarding procedures and rules about deadlines, content and flow of the process of service leads to repetitions of actions and sometimes unnecessary operations of control, which is a waste of time. This supports the thesis, advocated by the author about favor of the application of that toolbox in the practice of administrative services.

As a continuation of this statement, the choice of a viewable instrument could be completed, depending on the type of the process and the problems that have arisen. VSM maps are especially useful to describe the standardized and chain processes [16], which are usually with great repetitiveness. To govern such processes it is also important to find the place of unfinished production - files with documents or clients, waiting to be served.

The circumstances with processes, which are characterised by the active participation of the client, such as the individualised processes and the ones which contain an element of self service, could differ. Such is the case in the processes for providing a complex administrative service where employees from the front office, back office and other administrations co-operate. A key moment in the description of these working processes is to present the contact points between a client and an employee so that the interactions and the coordination between the participating parties could be managed. To describe this type of processes, the service plans are mostly suitable [11]; they give the opportunity to follow to the place and the performers of the activities at the front office and the back office, the moments of integration between them, as well as the physical evidence, supporting their fulfillment.

The opportunities to use the afore mentioned Lean instruments, the methodology of their development and their aprobaton on the basis of separate administrative service are presented in detail in another research done by the author [16].

### **Conclusion**

The brief review and analysis of the strategic documents, the goals and the tasks which underlie in them, show that the main problems and challenges before the Bulgarian administration in its work and also for better governance in the interest of the people during the new programme period. The research confirmed the thesis that in order to achieve effectiveness, efficiency and quality in the administrative services it is necessary to ensure one successfully working operations system. The main conclusion is that the way towards achieving this, starts with the optimisation and re-engineering of the working processes for providing public services by using the theoretical and practical solutions from the business administration and to continue with the creation of reliable mechanisms for their constant improvement.

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