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THE ROLE OF TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN DEVELOPING THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT PUBLIC INTEREST IN ASSOCIATIONS OF LIBERAL PROFESSIONS

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Abstract

The paper highlights the part of the results of a questionnaire-based research, carried out at the level of associations of liberal professions members of the Liberal Professions Union of Romania (LPUR). It was rated the implementation of the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) among the 14 member associations of professions and were identified LPUR most important success factors of TQM that can help increase the social responsibility to the public interest associations of members of liberal professions. The research was conducted from April 18 to May 31, 2017 at the headquarters of the professional associations shall LPUR at a representative sample of 100 employees from 130 thereof. They identified 58 strengths confirming a high level of implementation of TQM principles and 28 issues that require improvement. It was identified good results about „activities and general working conditions” and „Quality Control”. At the same time were discovered gaps on the „flexibility of the organization” and in „Identifying and capitalizing expectations in meetings with members”. On the one hand, based on the results analysed, it was determined that „Exigency examinations access to employment” and “Using professional standards” are the factors with the greatest impact on increasing social responsibility and the public interest and, on the other hand “the openness of associations - free competition” has the lowest impact.

Keywords: principles of total quality management, social responsibility, association of liberal profession, stakeholders, success factor for the defence of the public interest.

JEL Classification: A10, D02, F63, I23, M21, M41, M42, P47.

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Introduction

The associations of the liberal professions in Romania played a decisive role in achieving a functioning market economy. As professional public organizations without patrimonial purpose, they have the ultimate goal of defending the public interest, which is why they have placed in the centre of their concerns the quality of services provided by their members for the satisfaction of the public interest, the improvement of the economic climate, the consolidation of trust in professional activities, based on skills, honour, independence and morality. They promote, adopt and monitor the application of specific standards, methods and techniques. Through the work of its members, associations of liberal professions ensure proper development in a climate of trust and legality of activities, fulfilling a significant social role.

Quality has become the most important competitive advantage. The quality management system facilitates continuous improvement of product quality and customer service, thereby, increasing their satisfaction as well as of the other stakeholders, and continuously improve the performance of the industry. In order to achieve long-term benefits, the Romanian liberal professions must take into consideration the specific aspects of the implementation of the quality management systems provided by the international standards and take into account all the critical factors involved in the implementation of the principles of total quality management (TQM). Identifying customer needs and expectations is the starting point for all processes and activities that all staff need to participate (Dobran, 2009), regardless of where they operate within the organization. In TQM quality is all that is valuable to organizations that provide public services and their customers through the wise use of resources.

Taking these aspects into account, in order to highlight the role of total quality management in increasing social responsibility in order to safeguard to safeguard the public interest in the liberal profession associations, the research carried out was oriented in the following directions: Analysing the main models of total quality management and specifying the basic principles of TQM; Assessing the degree of implementation of the most important TQM principles in the liberal professions in Romania, highlighting the strengths and issues that require further improvement; Identifying the key success factors of TQM that can help increase social responsibility and protect the public interest.

1. Literature review

The vast majority of associations of liberal professions are united within the non-governmental and apolitical organization of the Liberal Professions Union of Romania (LPUR), non-profit legal entities. LPUR represents over 140.000 members of the 14 Liberal Professions Associations that have adhered to and fulfilled the conditions set forth in its Statute. „*Union of Liberal Professions of Romania is an observer member of the European Council of the Liberal Professions (ECLP) and the World Union of Liberal Professions (WULP). LPUR actively participates in the social dialogue organized within the Economic and Social Council of Romania, having observer status of this body*” (Union of Liberal Professions in Romania (ULPR), 2017a). As stated in the “*Common values of the liberal professions in the European Union*” (Union of Liberal Professions in Romania (ULPR), 2017b), a liberal professional, as a rule, after obtaining a university degree or recognition of a professional title, must meet additional training requirements and practical experience

before enrolling in a professional body for the pursuit of his professional to be allowed. First of all, the liberal professional must abide by the code of ethical and professional conduct. *“Customers and patients must be confident that the alleged violation of the Codes of Conduct will be treated seriously by the professional body concerned, and if it is proven that the violation has taken place, proportionate to the gravity of the infringement.”* ECLP recommends the inclusion of 17 minimum requirements in national codes of conduct to support liberal professionals, clients and patients. These relate to: confidentiality, continuing professional training to maintain competence in their field of practice, independence and impartiality, avoiding conflicts of interest, honesty and integrity, assuming responsibility, making clear misleading communication, good governance, etc. An essential role in the statutes of the professional bodies is assigned to the social aspects and the *“protection of the public interest”*. Social responsibility is an actual form of cooperation between governments, business and civil society. Promoting social defence objectives of public interest has implications in economic, political and social terms, based on the combination of economic elements with moral, pragmatic and deontological approaches.

From a brief analysis of the values promoted by the professional bodies of the liberal professions, we find that they overlap in a significant proportion with the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) and the requirements of social responsibility of ethical, moral and professional ethics. There are arguments that lead us to extend our study to approach the uniform level of professions, the role of TQM in developing the concept of social responsibility especially since, in the literature we have identified only a few studies on the social impact of the activities of auditors (Albu et al., 2011; Lungu, Caraiani and Dascălu, 2011), or concerns about the role of TQM in increasing the quality of medical services (Soare, 2001; Enăchescu, 1995).

In line with the views expressed in the literature (Olaru, et al., 2010), we can assume that the basic principles of TQM are the following: customer orientation *“market in”*, internalization of customer-supplier relationship, First plan, *“zero defects”* and continuous improvement, leadership, staff involvement, systematic vision, and reasoning with decision data. Depending on the culture specific to the different geographic areas, but also on the evaluation of the implications of various critical factors and TQM assets at international level, several models of TQM principles implementation have been defined. The best known are (Catuneanu and Drăgulănescu, 2001): The Japanese Model of TQM - National Deming Quality Award (1951); The American Model of TQM - National Quality Award Malcolm Baldrige (1987); The European Model of TQM - European Quality Award (1988); The Romanian National Model of TQM - Romanian Quality Award J.M. Juran (1997). However, the scandalous financial failures produced at the end of the last millennium, which seemed to predict the great crisis of 2007-2009, led to the development of reports that marked the limits of current management that: highlighted the failure of non-executive directors (Higgs, 2003); Have identified the limit of independence of external auditors following the crash of Arthur Andersen and the 2002 Enron scandal (Smith, 2003); Have analysed the role and effectiveness of CEOs in their obligation to achieve and maintain effective internal controls, to ensure the quality of financial reporting, and to detect any fraud before it becomes a problem (Turnbull, 1999). The financial crisis of 2007-2009 has further highlighted the fact that TQM and quality domains are generally facing new challenges. An increasing number of researchers and practitioners support the need to reinvent this area, while also militating for the introduction of social responsibility within

management systems (Castka and Balzarova, 2008). Innovation together with creativity is the main engines of development and adaptation (Dinu, Grosu and Săseanu, 2015). International standardization initiatives have come to support these concerns and trends. Thus, in 2004, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) announced a new standard covering social responsibility, ISO 26000, published in November 2010. According to ISO 26000/2010, social responsibility refers to: *“The actions of an organization to assume responsibility for the impact of its activities on society and the environment so that these actions: be consistent with the interests of society and sustainable development; To rely on ethical behaviour and to be in compliance with applicable laws and intergovernmental instruments; To be integrated into the organization's current activities”* (ISO, 2010).

TQM implementation assumes the involvement of all actors who are in favour of improving processes and not functional and hierarchical vision and integrating social responsibility who requires broadening involvement that should include all stakeholders not only customer orientation. It should also be noted that the European model of TQM includes a new principle, *“public accountability”*, which involves meeting the long-term best interests of an organization and its staff by adopting an ethical approach and exceeding the expectations of society.

The change of the *“get it right”* paradigm, promoted by TQM, with *“to do the right thing”*, promoted by Social Responsibility (SR), requires, from a practical point of view, the determination of the degree of overlapping of elements of total quality management and the responsibility social issues to identify how TQM can act as a launch platform for implementing social responsibility (SR) and capitalizing on their synergies. Analysing the pyramid of corporate social responsibility (Carroll, 1991; Carroll and Buchholtz, 2006) taking into account the main challenges arising from the development of the ISO 26000 standard (Castka and Balzarova, 2007), but in the forefront of implementing the conceptual model TQM (Mehra and Ranganathan, 2008), it becomes clear that both TQM and Corporate Social Responsibility CSR: accept that the main goal of organizations is the economic profitability; Strongly enforce compliance with specific laws and regulations; Calls for ethical values to meet customer satisfaction. What is also required for social responsibility for TQM is to extend from customer satisfaction to satisfying all stakeholders by adopting moral and philanthropic behaviour, because *“being a good corporate citizen”* and *“contributing resources to the community”*, we can really *“improve the quality of life”* (Carroll, 1991; Carroll and Buchholtz, 2006). This can create some tension in interactions with purely economic principles of TQM model if these additional costs are not used to increase the reputation or other benefits to the organization. That is why in the specialized literature (Drăghici and Petcu (Drăghici), 2011) is proposed a model of synergetic capitalization of the principles of TQM and CSR, a stage that can be reached by a mature organization, a stage defined as TQM based on knowledge or excellence CSR.

Stakeholders for organizations that provide services were identified and presented by (O'Connor and Spangenberg, 2008). For our study, it is important to identify the stakeholder circles that revolve around the liberal profession associations. We propose to structure them into: directly involved stakeholders; stakeholders and other interested parties involved, as shown in the figure no. 1.

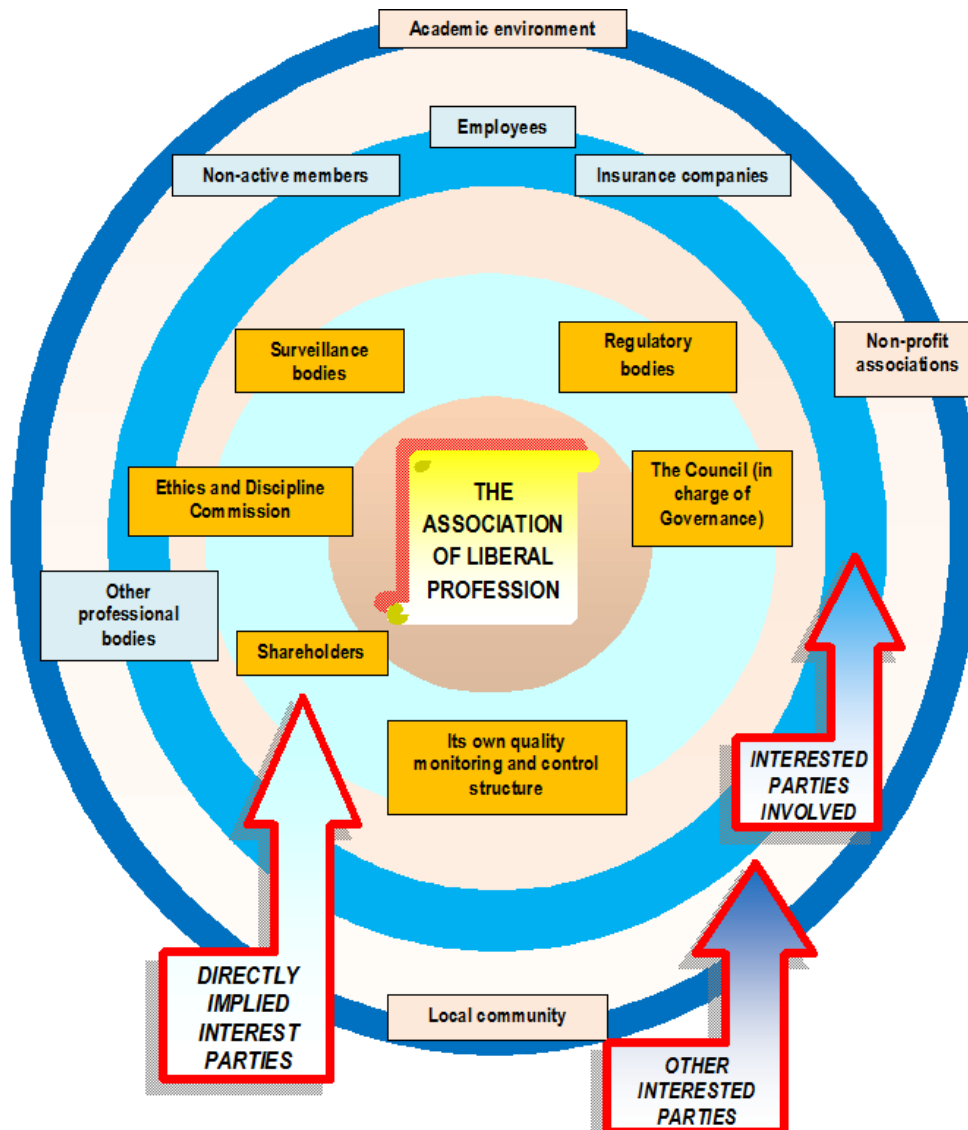


Figure no. 1: Structure of stakeholders

2. Research methodology

The main objective of the research is to evaluate the degree of implementation of the most important of TQM knowledge-based liberal professions, by identifying the strengths and the aspects to be improved. The secondary objective involves identifying the key success factors of TQM that can contribute to increasing social responsibility for public interest protection.

A survey based on a questionnaire, conducted between 18 April and 31 May 2017, on the main stakeholders directly involved was carried out to carry out the research. The study was conducted on *the Members of the Board of Directors (the elected representative body) and of the employees with management and executive positions of each professional association*. The success of the action was ensured by the involvement of a current or former member of the Governing Board for each LPUR member association. Its involvement, on the one hand contributed to the completion of the questionnaire given to employees (qualitative study) given his experience coordinating the activities of the association and facilitated its completion, on good relations he had with the most employees in the quality that he had or he have it, on the other hand, answered the open question: *Please list seven of the most important factors that may contribute to increased social responsibility for the public interest in the association you represent, specifying the intensity level: 1 = very low, 5 = very high*. Thus, 100 questionnaires were received, correctly completed, from those distributed to the 130 employees employed at the headquarters of the 14 LPUR member associations. The sample is representative of LPUR with a maximum error of 5% for a confidence level of 95%.

On the occasion of the visits to the headquarters of the LPUR member associations, for the completion of the Questionnaire, its handover and receipt, etc. we also made direct observations specific to the “*mysterious visits*” study on: the performance of the staff coming in direct contact with clients (education, members services, cashier, accounting, etc.), customer needs and expectations, reception and working conditions, customer reception staff. These observations have made it possible to identify strengths and weaknesses in relation to the customer, to discover deviations of compliance with specific instructions, rules and procedures.

3. Research results

The results of the research on the evaluation of the degree of implementation of the most important of the TQM principles are summarized in the tables no. 1-4.

In order to achieve the main objective of assessing the state of implementation of the TQM principles at the level of the liberal profession associations, the stages of the implementation of the principles were met: employee satisfaction and involvement; leadership; client orientation and customer satisfaction as well as top quality and continuous improvement that we consider essential for TQM within the liberal professions' associations. 58 strengths have been identified that can be generalized in all associations of liberal professions and 28 issues to be resolved in order to help increase the quality of the work of members of the associations of liberal professions and the degree of implementation of the TQM principles in their work for the proper fulfilment of the social role and defence of the public interest.

The results aimed at achieving the secondary objective are summarized in the table no. 5 and the figure no. 2, where are presented the most important success factors of TQM that can help increase the social responsibility to the public interest. The table no. 5 presents the factors with their frequency and intensity and the figure no. 2 presents their impact.

3.1. Measuring the degree of satisfaction and involvement of employees of associations of liberal professions

In order to be properly involved in the activities, the employees of the liberal profession associations must be satisfied with the environment in which they carry out their daily activities and feel part of the organization. Regularly evaluating employee satisfaction is absolutely necessary to address deficiencies and generalize favourable issues. Table no. 1 presents the main results on the strengths and those who required specific solutions for improvement.

Table no. 1: Measuring the degree of employee satisfaction and involvement

No.	What are the purposes of the responses	Strengths (% of total respondents)	Improvement points (% of total respondents)
1.	Organization image among employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 77% believe that information flows well between departments; - 69% appreciate the hierarchical superior; - 62% are proud to work in that organization; - 62% trust the organization; - 54% do everything they can to carry out their work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 85% feel unsafe if they say their opinion about what is not going well; - 77% believe that the “right person in the right place” principle does not apply to the organization; - 77% do not have a good opinion of the organization's leadership.
2.	Work carried out and general conditions of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 85% are satisfied with the technique they work with; - 77% are ready to change their way of working if this helps the organization; - 69% believe that the responsibilities are appropriate to the professional capacity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do not exist.
3.	Reward and benefits system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 92% trust the organization; - 85% are proud to be employees of the organization; - 69% are pleased with the way of compensating overtime. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 77% do not appreciate the training provided to employees; - 69% consider that the salary package is not proportionate to the responsibilities.
4.	Opportunities for professional development of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 85% appreciate the availability to inform the bank's seniority - 54% think they have real chances to advance in career within the organization - 54% consider the criteria and the annual score sheets clear. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 69% believe that promotions are not made on objective criteria; - 62% think they are not appreciated due to different ideas and opinions.
5.	Appreciation and motivation of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 77% consider their hierarchical superiors to be open to communication; - 77% believe that their merits are recognized; - 62% say they are happy with the evaluation and rewards received. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 54% think that the reward system (salary, premium) is not satisfactory.

6.	Balance between professional and private life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 92% consider that the responsibilities of the occupied post can be made only during normal working hours; - 77% say they have time for family and for private life - 69% declare that they can take paid leave under the conditions provided by law. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 62% believe that the organization's staff is not properly distributed in order to achieve the organization's goals.
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Source: Centralization of the results from the Questionnaire on the measurement of employee satisfaction and involvement.

3.2. Evaluation of leadership of liberal professions associations

The specific characteristic of the organizations of the liberal professions regarding the organizational management imposed a dualistic administration system (according to Article 74, paragraph 2 of the Law No. 31 of November 16, 1990, republished - the Law of Societies). Defining the vision, strategy and supervision of the organization's activity is dealt with by a Council or a Superior Council, elected by the General Assembly of the Members of the Professional Association for a period of 2-3 years, for a maximum of two terms. Directly, or from the members of the Council, a President is also elected. The employees of the association, representing the executive, are implementing the decisions of the Council. Table no. 2 shows the main results of the leadership assessment with the presentation of the strengths and those that need to be improved.

Table no. 2: Leadership assessment

No.	What are the purposes of the responses	Strengths (% of total respondents)	Improvement points (% of total respondents)
1.	Organizational vision and values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -64% consider the client, quality, professionalism and ethics as important issues; -56% of employees were consulted on goal definition and vision formulation; -56% believe that the organization's value system corresponds to its own values; -52% know the organization's vision and values. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -52% say they do not match leadership behaviour with the values promoted.
2.	Trust in leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -76% disagree that: everything is false, no one respects company values and even clients are deceived; -72% say the promises or statements of the leader are put into practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -52% say they do not match the leaders' behaviours with the values promoted.

3.	Organizational flexibility	-Do not exist.	-80% say the power of the decision is at the top of the pyramid; -68% believe that decisions are difficult to take due to bureaucracy, regulations and procedures.
4.	Teamwork	-76% say leaders encourage the atmosphere of cooperation and team spirit; -76% specify that the team has confidence and a pleasant atmosphere; -68% believe that the team has confidence and a pleasant atmosphere; -64% think merits are recognized within the team.	-64% think that they are not working in inter-departmental teams; -52% believe that team members do not participate in making decisions to find the best solution.

Source: Centralizing the results of the leadership assessment questionnaire

3.3. Customer orientation and customer satisfaction

TQM (Schneider, 2000) considers customer satisfaction a central factor in the success of the organization and the attachment of the client to the organization - a basic principle of strategic importance for its future. Although in the literature there are numerous papers that discuss quality and measuring quality of service (Olaru et al., 2000; Catoiu and Teodorescu, 1997) there is not yet a catalogue, widely recognized for deduction of the most important characteristics to measure satisfaction within the entities providing services. The difficulty is generated by the service entity that does not produce or distribute goods, but made immaterial processes that involve solving a certain problem requested by the client.

In order to assess customer satisfaction and customer focus, we capitalized on the one hand on some questionnaire answers and on the other hand on our own observations at the headquarters of the professional associations. The results of the study are presented in Table no. 3, a) and b).

Table no. 3: Measuring Customer Satisfaction and Customer Orientation

a) Based on a questionnaire

No.	What are the purposes of the responses	Strengths (% of total respondents)	Improvement points (% of total respondents)
1.	Collection and management of complaints	- 72% argue that there is a procedure for receiving and registering complaints; - 68% consider that complaints are assigned a unique number, which is kept from registration to settlement.	- 68% claim that older complaints, insufficiently solved, are not separately addressed; - 64% state that there is no organizational structure that solves complaints unitarily.

No.	What are the purposes of the responses	Strengths (% of total respondents)	Improvement points (% of total respondents)
2.	Solving complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 88% agree that complaints are considered as a barometer of quality; - 80% claim that the dynamics of complaints is analysed and known by those charged with governance; - 72% say that the departments whose activities are targeted are involved in the resolution of complaints; - 60% disagree that complaints are formally resolved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 72% consider that complaints are not resolved in a timely manner.
3.	Identify expectations at meetings with members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 76% maintain that members of the association can present their wishes at the meetings of those charged with governance; - 60% think that comments and complaints of members are collected and analysed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 84% say that the proposals and suggestions of the members are not included in the activity plan; - 60% believe that there are no frequent meetings with members.

Source: Centralization of the results from the Questionnaire on customer satisfaction measurement and customer orientation

b) Based on the study's direct observations, "mysterious visits"

No.	What are the purposes of the responses	Strengths	Improvement points
1.	Evaluation of the association's headquarters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It exists in an easy to reach central area; - It is generally easy to identify; - The area and the enclosure are cleaned. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are no parking spaces; - The division of the space is improper for the activity, the client having to go to several offices, sometimes to climb several floors, etc.
2.	Work point value (first customer impression)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are reception and guidance staff; - There exist a waiting space; - A glass of water can be served. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are no conditions for preparing a file or writing.
3.	Assessing the attitude of the staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The staff's dressing code is appropriate; - The staff is friendly and available; - Identifying customer needs is easy, with concrete concerns in identifying solutions; - The staff is aware of its duties and conscientiously solve their tasks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is no prompt answer to the phone; - The phone call is not routed to an available person and may not be honoured when working with customers.

Source: Centralization of direct observation results

3.4. Evaluating the principle of first-rate quality and continuous improvement

Service quality is the core concern of the associations of liberal professions and is considered by those charged with governance as a decisive factor in increasing social responsibility and defending the public interest. Quality requires continuous improvement. There is no permanent quality level. Continuous improvement is an integral part of the quality program (Feigenbaum, 1961). Improvement means the creation of a beneficial change, a useful change, a refinement, or even the achievement of a higher net efficiency (Moldoveanu and Dobrin, 2003). Considering the process of continuous improvement of service quality as a fundamental part of the Trilogy Juran (Juran, 2002) the planning - control - improvement, the results of the evaluation of the principle: the first quality and the continuous improvement are presented in the table no. 4.

Table no. 4: Evaluating the principle of first-level quality and continuous improvement

No.	What are the purposes of the responses	Strengths (% of total respondents)	Improvement points (% of total respondents)
1.	Quality planning (market research and study, designing and developing services)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 72% maintain that the characteristics of services that meet the needs of consumers are defined; - 60% appreciate that consumers' needs are determined; - 56% believe that consumers are identified - 52% say that the necessary resources are planned and allocated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 56% specify that processes are not developed to provide the required services.
2.	Quality control (solving current issues)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 68% believe that nonconformities are identified; - 52% claim that the quality is checked; - 52% appreciate that action is being taken to remedy nonconformities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do not exist.
3.	Improving quality (reducing the cost of poor quality and formulating new ambitious goals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 64% specify that improvement plans are selected; - 52% say that new mobilizing goals are being set; - 52% believe that teams are provided with the means, motivation and training required to resume the cycle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 64% say no teams are set for each plan; - 60% believe that the necessary infrastructure is not established.

Source: Centralization of the results from the Questionnaire on the assessment of the principle of first-quality quality and continuous improvement

3.5. Identify the key success factors of TQM that can help increase social responsibility for public interest protection

Defence of public interest is the fundamental element of the establishment and functioning of current professional associations. Professional associations through their own membership mechanisms, through study conditions, practical experience, internships, and exams of promotion exams, contribute to increasing the quality of service provided by their members and the trust of their clients in these services. Continuous training and monitoring of the quality of the services provided ensures the maintenance of professional competence and guarantees the quality of third party services. For some activities with greater social impact, independent supervisory bodies have been created.

Certain aspects regarding the quality of services and its decisive importance are confirmed by our study, by revealing the factors that have a decisive role in increasing the responsibility for defending the public interest, the results of which are summarized in table no. 5, which presents the frequency and intensity of the factors, and in figure no. 2 with their impact.

Table no. 5: Frequency and intensity of factors contributing to the increase of social responsibility for the protection of the public interest in the activity of the members of the liberal profession associates

No.	Factor's name	Frequency (%)	Intensity <i>I = very small, 5 = very high</i>
1	Establishment of external quality control structures at the level of associations	6,59	4,33
2	Existence of ethics and discipline committees	5,49	3,60
3	Requirements for access to profession	11	4,20
4	Conditioning access to seniority and internship	9,89	3,67
5	Continuous professional training	8,79	3,63
6	The existence of working groups	6,59	4,33
7	Ensured assistance for members	4,40	2,00
8	Periodic professional meetings and impression exchanges	7,69	3,71
9	Existence of specialized journals	5,49	2,60
10	Affiliation to international bodies	8,79	3,38
11	Use of professional standards	12,10	3,82
12	Translation of standards and good practice guides	7,69	4,14
13	Openness of associations - free competition	3,30	2,33
14	Establishment of super-surveillance bodies	2,20	3,00

Source: Centralization of results from Questionnaire on the frequency and intensity of factors contributing to the increase of social responsibility for the defence of public interest in the activity of members of the liberal profession associates

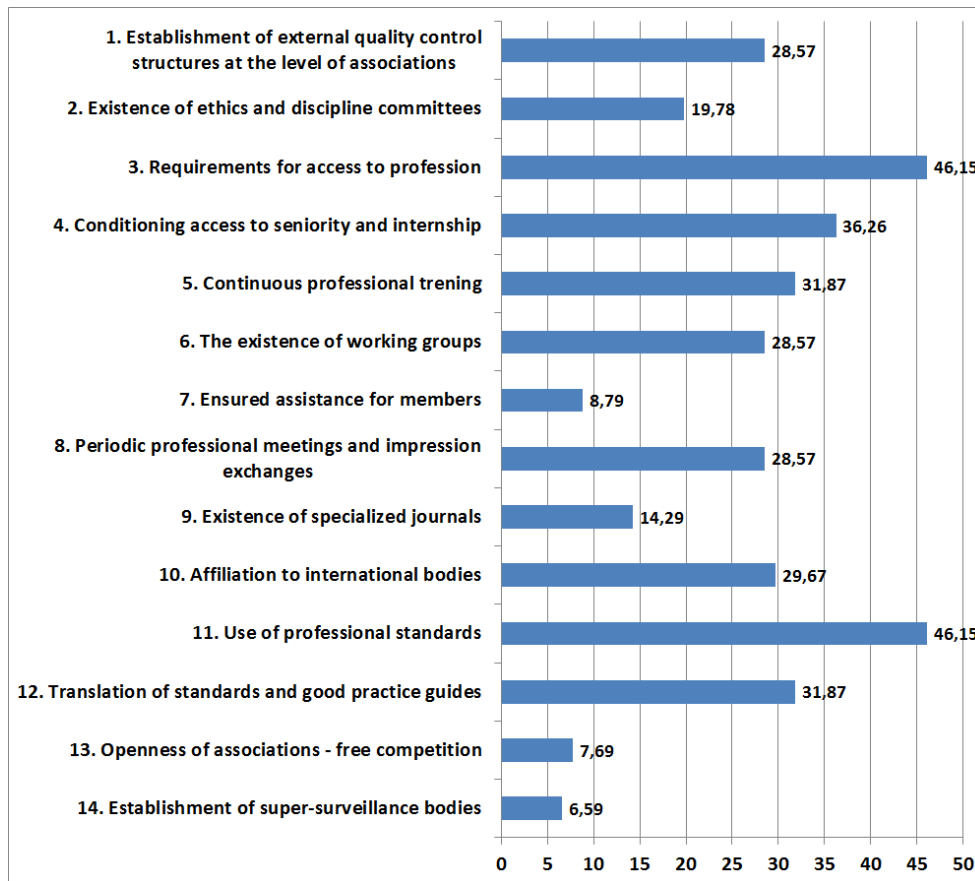


Figure no. 2: Impact of factors contributing to the increase of social responsibility for the defence of the public interest in the activity of the members of the liberal profession associates

Source: Centralization of results from the questionnaire on the impact of factors contributing to the increase of social responsibility for the defence of the public interest in the activity of members of the liberal profession associates.

As can be seen from the results obtained, the greatest impact of factors contributing to the increase of social responsibility for public interest protection is perceived as being determined by the exigency of the exams for access to the profession and the use of professional standards in the activity of the members of the professional associations.

Conclusions

The research made it possible to determine the state of implementation of the TQM principles at the associations of liberal professions members of LPUR. The degree of implementation of the TQM principles analysed was determined by calculating the weight of the criteria met in the total criteria assessed for each principle. Based on the results obtained, the highest implementation rate of 76,92% is related to the principle of "first-level

quality and continuous improvement” and the lowest level, with a percentage of 62,50%, reflects the level of implementation of the “leadership”. Following research conducted were identified 58 factors force that need to be generalized and capitalized at all associations but also a number of 28 issues requiring improvements, which can be a starting point for identifying causes and improving the quality and activity of associations liberal professions.

As a result of the analyses carried out, it emerges that, although there is a high level of implementation of the evaluated TQM principles, they have been identified alongside fully implemented criteria such as “Quality Control (Current Problems)” or “Activities and general working conditions”, non-implemented criteria targeting: “Flexibility of the organization”, or criteria implemented only 50%: *Identifying expectations at meetings with members*.

I also structured “stakeholder” model defined social responsibility “stakeholders directly involved”, “stakeholders involved” and “other stakeholders”. This classification was imposed by the specificity of the researched field, where the quality of the work of the associations of the liberal professions can only be analysed through and together with the activity of its members, representing “directly involved stakeholders”.

The results aimed at the secondary objective of the research allowed the identification of 14 factors considered relevant in the context of increasing social responsibility to defend the public interest in the work of members of the associations of liberal professions in their capacity as directly involved parties. With the highest frequency: 12,10%, the “Use of professional standards” factor in the activity was identified, while, with the lowest frequency: 2,20%, was identified the factor “Establishing Surveillance Bodies”. With the highest intensity of 4,33 out of 5, two factors were highlighted: “The establishment of external quality control structures at the level of associations” and “The existence of working groups”; The factor with the lowest intensity: 2,33 out of 5 conclude that it is represented by the “Openness of associations - free competition”. At the impact level, based on frequency and intensity, two factors were identified with the highest impact of 46,15%: “Exigency of Exams for Access to the Occupation” and “Use of Professional Standards” respectively. With the smallest impact: 6,60% has been highlighted the factor “Establishing Surveillance”.

The results of the study can be a starting point for either deepening research or identifying root causes of the main deficiencies found and finding the most appropriate solutions for improving work and increasing social responsibility for defending the public interest.

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