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Evaluation at strategic level of governance

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MINISTRY
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PARP

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Edited by Agnieszka Haber and Maciej Szałaj

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Development of strategic management remains one of the key challenges for Polish public institutions. Numerous limitations prevailed in this sector so far. They resulted e.g. from the high number of programme documents, whose time frames, scopes and even priorities quite often contradicted one another. Dynamics of change relating to socio-economic transformation generated also phenomena which in the environment of limited budgets oriented the main stream of the activity of State agencies at solving current problems and at mitigating the escalating tensions and crises.

In this context, Poland's accession to European Union structures became a milestone in our development. Modernisation processes accelerated to an unbelievable rate. Their effects are visible today in many social and public aspects of life. The added value of those changes is also visible at the level of administrative culture, where more and more attention is drawn to developmental activities streamlined to long-term objectives. The conditions for the development of strategic public management are very good at present. We have recently reviewed strategic documents, which allowed for the reduction of the number of such documents and improvement of their complementarity. Institutions have also focused on strategic reflection – they have re-defined their identity through setting their mission and vision and identifying key areas of their activity and directions of further development.

Similar measures are also taken by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development. Those actions resulted in the elaboration of PAED' Strategic Plan for 2010–2013, which assigns special attention to supporting innovation of Polish economy. It also stresses the role of public administration with cotemporary and modern organisation and management. Creation of such administration shall be one of the most important priorities of our activity in coming years. We are aware that an appropriate knowledge management system is the prerequisite of effective implementation of strategic assumptions, no matter how well they are planned. Effective functioning of such system depends on the information which is gathered through evaluation. Acceptance of this relation was the key reason for selecting the theme of this year's volume published within PAED publishing series dedicated to evaluation.

First part of this publication concentrates on various aspects of systemic inclusion of evaluation studies in the activities of public institutions and on the role which is and should be played by evaluation in the context of reforms relating to the economic crisis – probably the deepest economic crisis in modern, post-war times – or to current demographic trends.

The second part of this publication is devoted to methodological aspects. The authors have reflected on the possibilities of applying research methods and techniques which were not generally applied in Polish evaluation studies so far or which have been used, but in contradiction with their nature.

I do hope that the readers find the publication interesting and inspiring in their every-day work.

Bożena Lublińska-Kasprzak
Chief Executive Officer of the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development

Michał Boni

Evaluation in strategic management of the State – mid- and long-term perspective

The "Poland 2030" report has become an occasion for a substantive debate on the future of our country and rule of development policy. It has also created an opportunity for introducing new rules for preparing strategic documents. Before, such documents covered shorter time frames and were mostly adjusted to the course of works of the European Union and focused on translating those works into operational programmes which allow for the absorption of EU funds. Sectoral approach prevailed, which resulted in an "overproduction" of documents addressed as "strategic" (almost 200 such documents existed in 2008).

The essence of "Poland 2030" consisted in a new civilisational project oriented at the future – at one generation ahead of the one which currently specifies the important objectives of the country. The document – prepared by the members of the Board of Strategic Advisors to the Prime Minister of Poland basing on an analysis, description and evaluation of the 20 years that followed transformation – presents ten key challenges which are of primary importance for the future, along with dilemmas that need to be solved before challenges can be faced. Incentives for thinking in realistically strategic terms were created, associated with formulating visions, goals and instruments which are essential for the achievement of the set objectives.

The practical result of the discussion and ongoing works on the amendments to the Act on conducting development policy was to create a new strategic order. In compliance with the expectations of the EU as regards strategic documents a new model was created. The framework consists of: Long-term National Development Strategy (2030 perspective) and Concept of National Spatial Development (always 20 years ahead) and National Spatial Development Plan. Within this framework, following documents should be incorporated: the Mid-term National Development Strategy (10 years perspective) in correlation with the European programme document (EU 2020) and 9 integrated strategies referring to: Innovation and Economic Efficiency, Transport Development, Energy Security and Environmental Protection, Regional Development, Human Capital Development, Social Capital Development, Sustainable Development of Agriculture and Rural Areas, Efficient State and National Security and Safety of the Republic of Poland.

Such strategic order requires evaluation as its integral part. Evaluation understood as an objective assessment conducted at all stages of implementation, i.e. planning, implementation and review. Such evaluation should consist in systematic analysis of the legitimacy and effectiveness of the actions taken by the State and its administration or actions taken by entities providing public services. It should also entail the analysis of the results of those actions, standards of operation, impact and precision of identifying needs that are to be satisfied.[1] It should provide reliable and useful information, which may be used in the decision-making process.

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[1]   M. Ferry, K. Olejniczak, *Wykorzystanie ewaluacji w zarządzaniu programami unijnymi w Polsce*, Sprawne Państwo, [*The use of evaluation in the management of EU programmes in Poland*], Ernst & Young, Warsaw 2008.

Evaluation must become an integral instrument of the process of developing policies and of any actions aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public administration to assure that citizens have full rights and to improve economic competitive position of Poland and to ensure effective cooperation with self-governmental administration.

Evaluation must not become yet another bureaucratic burden. It must be a challenge intrinsic for the creation of a modern State.

Part I

Evaluation in strategic
management system

Witold M. Orłowski

Evaluation – an instrument for reflective management of the State

Premises for reforms of Polish State institutions

Last two years provided comprehensive material for consideration of the methods to reform the institution of the Polish State, assure the growth of those methods' efficiency and adjustment to the challenges of contemporary times. It results in particular from the premises referred to below, which are partly of local nature specific for our country, and partly of global and common nature:

- Problems that State institutions will have to face in the coming decades, in particular those related to the preservation of competitiveness and economic growth under the conditions of unfavourable demographic trends, poor adjustment to the challenges of social security economic models, possible global economic instability, effects of hindered access to natural resources and excessive debt.
- Global financial crisis which has revealed numerous dangerous weaknesses in the current model of states and economies, led in consequence to a discussion about the need to change the role of the State in the contemporary world.
- The - so far - insufficiently resolved problem of high inefficiency of public institutions in the countries that have undergone transformation from communist system into a free-market economy.
- The need to take full advantage of the opportunities brought to life by Polish membership in the European Union, in particular effective, long-term development strategy that would allow for decisive reduction of the gap separating our country from the western part of the EU.[2]

It is beyond doubt that the resolution of these problems requires both the ability to create a strategic action plan and an effective implementation thereof. It also requires radical improvement in the functioning of public institutions - creation of mechanisms that motivate those institutions to increase efficiency[3]. Certainly the scale and difficulty of measures taken by today's State mean that both the mistakes and acts of omission in the course of implementation can have catastrophic consequences. Measures and tools necessary to carry out reforms also include evaluation in broad sense, that is a multi-faceted assessment of programmes or projects implemented by public sector on the basis of clear and precisely defined criteria.[4] This study will attempt to answer the question of the role the public sector could and should play in reflective State management – management based on constant analysis of needs and threats, on formulation of adequate strategies for the adjustment of changes and control of adopted solutions' effectiveness.

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[2] Possibility to reduce that distance are analysed in detail in: W.M. Orłowski, *W pogoni za straconym czasem. Wzrost gospodarczy w krajach Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej 1950–2030* [*In pursuit of lost time. Economic growth in Central and Eastern Europe countries in 1950–2030*], PWE, Warsaw 2009.

[3] These problems are pointed out by governmental document *Poland 2030*, the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, Warsaw, 2009. It states that, among others, Polish public institutions lack mechanisms that motivate employees to increase effectiveness and to use solutions allowing for task accounting by individual entities.

[4] It should be noted that there is no unambiguous, commonly recognised definition of evaluation. For instance Wikipedia presents a whole chapter devoted to the definition of this notion and it quotes 12 definitions, which are often very different from each other (see www.wikipedia.org).

Changing role of the State: global challenges[5]

The global financial crisis taking place before our eyes requires reorientation of many of previous views both concerning the economy and the State's role in that economy. The Polish State, just like almost all European States, needs to re-formulate its role in the economy. Followed by far-reaching reforms that would adjust that role to potential future challenges.

This is obviously not a new problem and the discussion has continued for decades[6]. Even a century ago, the presence of the State in the economy was very slight and the expenditure usually reached 5–10% of the GDP. To a certain extent, it obviously performed regulatory functions (yet the canons of *laissez-faire* policy consisted in limiting interventions to the minimum in order to avoid ruining the market), it frequently successfully participated in the development of infrastructure and certain services necessary for the economy. But the principal expenditure was aimed at the implementation of Smiths' "night watchman": maintenance of army, police, administration and jurisdiction.

Only later did the new embodiment of the State appear – the welfare state whose main role consisted in supporting economic and social activity. Its symbolic beginning was constituted by the reforms introduced by Chancellor Bismarck (implemented prior to the spreading of socialist ideas among workers). However modest, social insurance systems requiring moderate financing were not a burden for public finance for many decades. Still in the middle of the 20th century, all the governmental expenditure of Western Europe States for peaceful purposes did not exceed 20–30% of the GDP and 15% in the USA, half of which represented social expenditure. However, the State's activity and its role in the economy have clearly increased, and the doctrine of *laissez-faire* has been commonly superseded by Keynesian dogma about the possibility of "improving" the functioning of the market through skilful governmental intervention in the economy.

Rapid changes took place as late as in the second half of the 20th century. Deliberate choice of the social model came into play, where the role of the State has become to assure social sustainability through redistribution of income and through high standards of social security. The concept of building an "active State" did not have only one political face – both socialists and Christian democrats supported it. Turbulent economic development of Western Europe in 1950s and 1960s was accompanied by the formation of "the European social model", in which high labour efficiency was accompanied by high sense of social security. The acme of perfection in this respect has been achieved by Scandinavian countries through the creation of a commonly admired mixture: efficient economy as in capitalism combined with social security so outstanding that communist countries could only dream of. This model has been commonly accepted by the societies of Western Europe and any attempt to change it causes violent protests.[7]

The deliberate choice coincided with the principle of "downward rigidity" specific for social expenditure. Although social expenditure increases along with the GDP in the times of prosperity (politicians, social organisations and trade associations make efforts to assure that the unemployed fully use the benefits of economic development), they are protected against slump in the period of economic downturn or slow production growth through appropriate indexing measures. As a result, the percentage of social expenditure in the GDP usually remains at a constant level in the prosperous years and increases in meagre ones. In the long run, it is the way towards constant growth. In consequence, the

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total State expenditure in the Western Europe has increased to 40–50% of the GDP (in the USA to 35%). Despite conspicuous and widely advertised reforms, endorsed by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in particular, nobody has managed to change this state of affairs anywhere in a permanent manner. However, high expenditure has to be accompanied by high taxes which reduce the competitiveness and are the only available long-term method of financing that expenditure. It should be pointed out at the same time that an attempt to preserve this social model precisely and the model of State's functioning in the incoming decades would necessitate further increase in expenditure followed by tax increase (reaching a ridiculously high level) or constant increase in debts – reaching a level that would obviously entail the State's bankruptcy.[8]

It should be noted in the case of Poland that the current role of the State is formed in a quite accidental manner. The expenditure of public sector also amounts to approximately 44% of the GDP, and so it equals that of Western Europe. In the countries of the Central and Eastern Europe, it is accidental to a great extent, not like in the case of Western Europe, where there was a deliberate social choice implemented through democratic mechanisms. The current role of the State in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe was formed neither as a result of deliberate decision nor as a result of democratic debate process, but as an intrinsic drift after the collapse of communism. Where hyperinflation took place, public expenditure in relation to the GDP has rapidly fallen. Sometimes an attempt to keep them at a slightly lower level was successful (e.g. in the Baltic States or in Russia), but after a certain period, they were on the increase again as soon as the economy recovered[9]. Therefore, our State spends in relation to the GDP the same amounts as the Western Europe States, although in many cases much less efficiently. The society, on the other hand, behaves in a more schizophrenic manner: it is mostly unsatisfied with the State's functioning and would wish for a limitation of its role (which is expressed by unswerving support for the idea of lowering taxes and common consent to escape to the grey market), and at the same time it has no objections that each group jealously guards all its inherited privileges – sometimes hard to explain, indeed.

Problems with the State's reforms[10]

The current global financial crisis – assuming that it still lasts for years and causes shocks by its new stages[11] – may become a catalyst for thinking of a new role of the State and new scale and structure of its expenditure. It is slowly taking place in the Western Europe and will most likely take place in the USA in a few years (the USA are still waiting for their debt crisis), and will probably sooner or later take place in Poland as well. However, the reforms of the State and its expenditure involve five grave problems.

Firstly, the currently ongoing debate does not address the crux of the matter. The discussion is conducted mainly from quite extreme ideological positions. Radical critics of liberal capitalism indicate the crisis as a proof that neoliberal paradigm of development was completely mistaken and the State has to return to its active role in the economy – preferably like in the golden age of Keynesianism fifty years ago. It appears to be an exaggerated conclusion, except for the undoubted development success observed in many fields in the world within the pre-crisis quarter century. The period of common deregulation and globalisation has led to gigantic technological progress, development of trade and investment and it

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[8]   According to analyses, the preservation of the current western social models would cause an increase in public debt of the largest world's economies (G-7) to the level of over 400% of the GDP in 2050 *(Global Aging 2010: An Irreversible Truth,* Standard & Poor's, London 2010).

[9]   An analysis of development paths of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the second half of 20th century is included in: W.M. Orłowski, *W pogoni za straconym czasem...,* op.cit.

[10]   Cf. W.M. Orłowski, *Państwo: w przededniu...,* op.cit.

[11]   Justification of this thesis is included in the study: W.M. Orłowski, *Jakie szanse na nowy porządek ekonomiczny świata?,* [*What are the chances for the new economic order in the world?*], Strategic Yearbook 2009/10, No. 15, 2010, p. 38–41.

allowed the countries that were able to use it properly to accelerate economic growth considerably. It has failed only in so far as it has not provided the promised mechanisms of market adjustment and automatic correction of increasing imbalance. It should be kept in mind, however, that the world today is different than over fifty years ago, and certainly an attempt to apply the methods of that time would soon cause a disaster.

On the other hand, the advocates of capitalism will reduce the entire problem to a series of mistakes made either by the governments or central banks issuing excessive money onto the market, or eventually by incorrectly managed financial institutions. An exaggerated simplification can be found here as well - consisting in protecting the former paradigm by avoiding the answer to the question: if it was correct, why were the automatic regulatory mechanisms protecting the economy from increasing imbalance activated? However interesting the discussion between the critics and advocates of liberalism might be, it completely disregards the core of the problem. On the one hand, quarter century of deregulation has caused huge development of production, trade and investment. On the other hand, however, the system has not succeeded due to its failure to provide effective mechanisms of automatic correction of imbalance on the market. Therefore the State must not return to its activity, either to the State of 1960 or that of 2000. A new way of functioning should be identified, where full freedom of functioning for the global market is accompanied by much more efficient regulatory and prudential mechanisms, and the economic development is promoted by wise policy supporting education, knowledge development=, activity and innovativeness of citizens.

Secondly, the contemporary State has to re-define its functions and its role that it can and should play. Certain commitments from the past simply cannot be fulfilled while other ones are just beginning to emerge. Demographic trends already threaten to cause colossal deficits in the States' pension systems and failing fundamental system reforms, it would bring States and economies to ruin in the next 2–3 decades. What is more, in the conditions of globalisation and substantial free movement of labour and capital, other past promises of welfare State are not able to be fulfilled either. This means that pension and healthcare systems have to be reprivatised to a great extent – meaning that larger part of responsibility for one's own fate has to be returned from the State to the citizens. And this translates into the need for an extraordinary growth in the scale and sophistication of regulatory activity since only this way the State is able to fulfil "its" part of the task.

Thirdly, the problem of impact exerted by the State on the economy has to be viewed from a new perspective. Free market is the only mechanism known to be effective in long-term development, and irreversible changes from past decades have caused that there is no retreat from some phenomena – e.g. globalisation. Beyond doubt, free market fails and is not able to generate automatic protection measures prior to the increase of lethal imbalance and catastrophic crises. Thus, the main role of the State in the economy is obvious –regulatory support for development so as to prevent a tragedy. In the contemporary world the dream that – like fifty years ago – the economy can be simply manipulated by humans is no longer justified. Instead, the State has to develop effective methods to regulate the markets in cooperation with other countries, large private entities and civil society organisations.

Fourth, followed by these reflections, the structure and volume of the State's expenditure should be completely redesigned. Budgets have to take into account appropriate resources which would allow for the employment of efficient and competent officials, who should receive remuneration more or less the same as the best experts in the private sector (if they are to supervise them effectively). The budgers must foresee appropriate resources to support scientific research, education, innovations – to put it short, the activities that will directly translate into competitiveness of the economy. And because everything will probably have to be done in conditions of tax income lower than today, the remaining expenditure has to be reduced sharply. The main source of savings obviously has to be the reduction in the scale of

welfare state, as described above. However, other types of expenditure "of the past" have to undergo gradual elimination, such as subsidies for mines or agriculture.

Fifth, a new view on the problem of efficiency in the functioning of the contemporary State will need to be developed. If it is to function more effectively and cost less, it has to be more efficient. The need to improve human capital in public services has already been mentioned. It requires the employment of much fewer, but radically better paid and more competent public officials that are actually remunerated for the effects of their work. On the other hand, the tools for the improvement in the efficiency of public institutions are suggested by new public management, that is the new school of thinking about the public sector that has emerged in 1980s. Irritation caused by weak transparency and effectiveness of activity of public institutions remained at the heart of it, with the achievement of record-breaking level of funds operated by the contemporary State in the human history. Of course nobody claims that public institutions function in the same way as private enterprises. But on the other hand, there is no reason not to introduce the main rules applicable in the world of private institutions: rationality of spending funds, clarity of tasks and objectives, responsibility for outcomes, remuneration depending on the results.

Necessary developments in Polish public finance

The current crisis has to lead to the formulation of serious conclusions concerning the necessary developments in Polish public finance. Firstly, the Polish State, just like almost all European States, needs a new definition of its role in the economy. Secondly, Poland needs an adjustment programme that will assure improvement of the balance in public finance and will permanently avert the threat of surpassing the constitutional 60% limit for the debt-GDP ratio. Thirdly, the efficiency of Polish State institutions' functioning has to be radically improved. This should lead to far-reaching reforms that adjust Polish public finance to the challenges of the future. It applies both to the forms and measures used by the State to influence the situation on the market on the one hand, and to the scale of deficit and public debt, structure of public expenditure and income and finally the mechanisms forcing economic growth on the other.

In this context, what should be noted is also the structure of public finance in Poland, which represents a substantial limitation of freedom to introduce reforms. Approximately two thirds of entire public expenditure of Poland is constituted by spending made by self-government authorities (over 15% of the GDP) and by social insurance funds (over 12% of the GDP). This expenditure is financed partially through own income and partially by obligatory grants and subsidies awarded by the State. As a result, the State budget – although in theory covering expenditure reaching 29% of the GDP while having the income amounting to 27% of the GDP – is very rigid and does not allow much space for instance for actions aimed at savings (following the consolidation, meaning the obligatory transfer from State budget to self-governments and social insurance funds, it turns out that the actual expenditure of central budget represents only a bit over 17% of the GDP, with the part of this expenditure being rigid as well). The problem that should be kept in mind when analysing the possibility of far-reaching reforms is that changes cannot be made without serious legal adjustments that must assure that the self-government and social insurance subsector are covered by the reforms.

When analysing the scale and structure of public expenditure in Poland, it should be pointed out that we are discussing a phenomenon that has its deep historical roots. Public expenditure in Poland amounts to approximately 44% of the GDP and its volume and structure have been formed first as a result of strong – typical of communist system – intervention of the State in the economy, and afterwards as a result of intrinsic drift that took place after the collapse of communism.[12] In the case of high inflation,

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[12] An analysis of these changes is included in: W.M. Orłowski, *Jakie szanse...,* op.cit.

the establishment of relations of particular types of expenditure to the GDP was affected by the applied indexing mechanisms (for instance high pension indexation rate in 1990 has caused a significant and permanent increase of the pensions' share in the GDP). Paradoxically, the next stage of the drift of Polish public finance was posed by the membership in the European Union. The drift is understood here as the change of structure and scale of expenditure that does not result from deliberate and well considered State policy, but arises from the phenomena that are not fully under control (which does not mean that they are necessarily disadvantageous). It involved primarily the need to generate funds that are indispensable to co-finance investment projects implemented with the involvement of funds from the European Union budget. In consequence, the ratio of public investment to the GDP and expenditure for administration has increased, which was largely explained by the need to provide administrative management for EU transfers (employment of administration has increased by 9.6% at the same time, mainly in the self-government subsector). Unfortunately, a decrease in the growth rate in 2009 with a simultaneous increase in the expenditure on investment has caused a considerable increase in deficit and debt of the public sector. These phenomena affect the development perspectives of the country to a significant degree and in detrimental way.[13]

Therefore, it should be concluded that in order to assure long-term, positive impact of theState on the development of Poland, the structure and volume of expenditure of Polish State should be redesigned entirely. At the same time, a new view on the problem of efficiency of State institutions will have to be developed. If they are to function more effectively and cost less, they must be more efficient.

How to increase the efficiency of State institutions' functioning?

As indicated by the above considerations, the key role in reforms that are to facilitate the functioning of the Polish State is played by the issue of increasing the efficiency of its functioning. This problem has been dealt with for many years by the management theory, which is oriented at the public sector.[14]

According to the great theoretician of management, Peter Drucker, each entity, including a business as well, has to define its fundamental strategy – that is the goal of its existence.[15] In opposition to popular beliefs, even in the case of an enterprise, this goal is not constituted simply by maximisation of profits. Profits are obviously necessary for a business for its efficient operation and implementation of the primary objective (in particular the ability to generate profit in the long-term, which is sometimes contradictory to short-term profitability, comes into play). However, the primary objective always consists in satisfying the needs of customers since it is the basis that allows long-lasting functioning of a company (according to Drucker, a company exists to increase the number of its customers). In line with this reasoning, a business has two fundamental functions: the marketing function and the innovative function. The marketing function consists in learning and understanding the needs of customers as much as possible and hence in the endeavours to ideally tailor the products to these needs. On the other hand, the innovative function consists in the identification of methods to generate and provide these products to the customer in the most economic way.

After short consideration, it must be concluded that, despite appearances, the fundamental strategy of public authority bodies (public sector) does not differ so much from the one that Drucker has defined

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[13] Review of the impact exercised by deficit and debts of public sector on global economic growth is included, among others, in: *Public Finance Reform During the Transition: The Experience of Hungary,* L. Bokros, J.J. Dethier (Ed.), World Bank, Washington 1999.

[14] Cf. J. Boston, J. Martin, J. Pallot, P. Walsh, *Public Management: The New Zealand Model,* Oxford University Press, Auckland 1996 and R. Malchione, *Making Performance Measurement Perform,* [in:] *The Boston Consulting Group on Strategy,* C.W. Stern, M.S. Deimler (Ed.), John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken 2006.

[15] Cf. P.F. Druckner, *Myśli przewodnie* [*The Essential Drucker*], MT Biznes, Warsaw 2008.

for business entities. If we agree that an enterprise exists in order to increase the number of its customers (that is, to satisfy their needs), then public sector exists in order to satisfy collective needs of citizens. Public sector should also perform two functions being the equivalent of marketing and innovative function in business entities. It should analyse social needs and adjust its activity to those needs (generated public goods), which is the equivalent of the marketing function. On the other hand, it should strive for increased efficiency of its functioning though providing the highest quality public goods at the least possible cost, which is the equivalent of the innovative function.

However, there are differences between the goals set for a business entity and public sector institutions. The first difference consists in that the marketing function of an enterprise is implemented through signals coming from the market. An efficiently functioning free market provides signals about the preferences of consumers expressed as formulation of the market, prices and profitability of production of particular goods (if the demand for goods desired by consumers increases faster than supply, the prices increase, followed by the profitability of production of these goods). It provides well-managed business entities with broad information on the needs of consumers, allowing for an analysis and determination of objectives within the scope of marketing function. However, in the case of public goods provided by State institutions, the market mechanisms are simply not there to help. As a rule, public goods are provided through non-market channels, and thus they do not have the prices set by the market (e.g. educational services), or their value cannot be assessed using the market method (e.g. national defence). The function of social needs' analysis is therefore implemented on a short-term basis through political process in which the politicians negotiating the division of public spending represent interests of various social groups.[16] In the long-term, the adjustment of provided public goods to social needs takes place by democratic mechanisms (giving power to the politicians who declare the changes desired by the society in the structure and amount of various expenditure groups). From this point of view, the indicators of party's popularity can be an equally important hint for the politicians responsible for the budget, as the ones indicated by research concerning the changes in the share in the market for managers administering enterprises.

Another essential difference is that the innovative function of business entities is implemented under the conditions of pressure exercised by market competition. It is primarily competitive pressure that forces enterprises to search for more effective and efficient methods of generating goods. This pressure is also strengthened by measures taken by various stakeholders, including but not limited to the ones striving for maximisation of profits or long-term renown of its owners. As a result, the threat of falling profitability or falling out of the market forces business entities to constantly search for better methods of production and distribution of goods, contributing to the development of innovations, technological and organisational progress and general increase in efficiency. However, in the case of public goods provided by State institutions, there is no such pressure. Apart from rare examples, the competition among providers basically does not exist, and the equivalent of owner's pressure exercised by the citizens (in theory, as taxpayers and beneficiaries vested with the right to feel the most important stakeholders of public sector) is extraordinarily weak. Therefore, the implementation of the task consisting in increasing the efficiency in the functioning of public sector can take place only by imposing appropriate pro-efficiency solutions in the process of creating and implementing the budget and in reference to the system of stimuli and incentives for public sector managers.[17]

This purpose is served by solutions proposed by new public management, including but not limited to introduction of rules and solutions of activity-based budget. Activity-based budget is built in a completely different manner than the traditional one. In the case of activity-based budget, the main

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[16] These problems are discussed in: *Teoria wyboru...*, op.cit.
[17] Cf. J. Boston, J. Martin, J. Pallot, P. Walsh, *Public Management,* op.cit. and R. Malchione, *Making Performance...*, op.cit.

criterion for the division of funds is represented by the tasks that have to be carried out by the State, instead of institutions, which have their own institutional ambitions, interests and goals, which are not necessarily consistent with the interest of the State and society as a whole. Therefore, a list of tasks arising from the assessment of social needs is first specified for public institutions. Afterwards, specific goals to be achieved within a given time horizon are attributed to the tasks. Subsequently, outlays necessary for the implementation thereof are attributed to such tasks. If there is a task and goal and consequently outlays – there is also an institution that is directly responsible for its implementation and the management of allocated resources. Finally, indicators characterising the results of implementing a task – and thus making it possible to verify whether public money is spent in effectively, serving the purpose of implementing the goal – are determined for each task.

Hence, activity-based budget starts to work only when the tasks are correctly assigned to specific goals, these goals actually become the basis for the division of funds and the functioning of public institutions begins to be assessed through indicators. Only then are public institutions provided with clear guidelines and measures for the implementation of goals, being at the same time vested with responsibility for their effective use.[18]

Importance of evaluation for an increase in efficiency of State institutions' functioning

What role in the programme of reforming Polish public finance, and in a broader sense – in the programme of reforms increasing the efficiency of reflective management of the State, should be played by evaluation? We should begin with an assertion that the plans to reform Polish public finance have been focused for a dozen years on the proposals of changing the structure and number of various expenditure categories, changing the amount and method of calculating taxes and striving for a reduction in budget deficit (or in a broader sense, the deficit of public finance sector). Without denying the need for such changes, it should be pointed out, the path of reforms so far has unfortunately not brought a fundamental breakthrough in the situation of Polish public finance. A vicious circle emerges: on the one hand, we have relatively high expenditure hindering the process of balancing public finance, and, on the other hand, there is popular dissatisfaction with the functioning of the public sector (and, consequently, expectation of an increase in expenditure) and mass escape to the grey market, which additionally reduces the income from taxes. In such a situation, the application of tools alone that limit the expenditure and increase fiscalism as a method to stop the process of increasing public debt seems to be doomed. Moreover, it could explain the general failures experienced for years by our country in this respect.

The vicious circle could be stopped only in one way: by a significant increase in efficiency of spending public money. Only this way would it be possible to assure that the functions of the State are performed in a better way on the one hand and that, at the same time, it is possible to stop the process of increasing the debt while maintaining moderate taxes (or reducing them) on the other. For that purpose, it is necessary to initiate mechanisms that would allow for and force the growth of such efficiency.[19]

Although efficiency and effectiveness of implementing the goals of State institutions is constantly an object of society's interest, the pressure in this area is undoubtedly as strong as in business entities.[20]

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[18] The issue of activity-based budget is discussed in: *Budżet zadaniowy w Polsce* [*Activity-based budget in Poland*], T. Lubińska (Ed.), Difin, Warsaw 2007.

[19] An entire chapter is devoted to that problem in the strategic governmental document: *Poland 2030*.

[20] It is of course a simplification – the analysis of phenomena taking place in the global economy in recent decades allows for the observation that also in the case of business institutions, market mechanisms (notably the short-term ones, and thus related mainly with the current profitability) cannot be constituted by one factor defining the long-term efficiency of functioning, cf. W.M. Orłowski, *Jakie szanse...*, op.cit., s. 38–41. It is all the more hard to expect that one mechanism will suffice to assure an effective and efficient implementation of measures of public institutions, cf. R. Malchione, *Making...*, op.cit.

Therefore, the creation of mechanisms that are able to replace "automatic" functioning of market mechanisms playing the main role in disciplining business institutions has to be the prerequisite for effective strategy for an increase in efficiency of functioning of State institutions.

Such mechanisms have to be based on impartial, multi-faceted evaluation – conducted on the basis of clear methodological foundation – of implementing particular programmes by public institutions. It should be pointed out here that such an analysis might be effectively conducted only when activity-based budget is in fact introduced that clearly formulates the goals and tasks implemented by public institutions. In a traditional budget, evaluation is practically limited to the analysis of correct spending of funds, whereas in the case of activity-based budget, it can play the key role both in the assessment alone of the efficiency of particular institutions implementing the programmes and in the creation of mechanisms promoting an increase in efficiency (e.g. by means of bonuses paid according to effects and allocating funds to tasks that can be implemented more efficiently than the other).[21] In other words, without an effective evaluation system – covering all the important fields of State's activity – the desired far-reaching reforms of institutions are in principle impossible, just as it is not likely that reasonableness of decisions will increase.

Another important aspect of evaluation's role in reflective management of the State consists in attributing the responsibility for the results of actions more precisely, and consequently an increase in democratisation and transparency of taken decisions[22]. Dealing with the above-mentioned huge challenges faced by a contemporary State in an effective manner requires an increase in public acceptance and public understanding of taken decisions – often very difficult and not welcomed by large social groups. Evaluation can play a double role here. On the one hand, it allows – in particular *ex ante* evaluation – for the presentation of analysis justifying the purposefulness of measures. And on the other hand, – in particular *ex post* evaluation – it provides the society with information on the effectiveness of State institutions' operation and resolution of problems faced by the State, which might result in increased legitimisation to conduct necessary measures.

To sum up, the implementation of effective reforms of the Polish State and adjusting it to the requirements and difficult challenges of the contemporary world has to be accompanied by mechanisms – much more efficient than in the past – of impartial assessment of the State institutions' functioning and resultant mechanisms forcing an increase in their efficiency. It requires, among others, further development of the culture of a versatile and reliable evaluation, both the *ex ante* evaluation, serving mainly the purpose of improving the quality of analysing the development challenges and strategic planning, and *ex post* evaluation, serving the purpose of assessing the efficiency of State institutions and consequently the use of pro-efficiency tools of activity-based budget.

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[21] Cf. J. Górniak, *Ewaluacja jako instrument współczesnej polityki gospodarczej,* [*Evaluation as an instrument of contemporary economic policy*] [in:] *Ewaluacja wobec wyzwań stojących przed sektorem finansów publicznych,* [*Evaluation against the challenges faced by the public finance sector*] A. Haber, M. Szałaj (Ed.), PAED, Warsaw 2009.

[22] Cf. K. Frieske, *Nauki społeczne w służbie spraw publicznych – polskie tradycje* [*Social sciences in public affairs – Polish traditions*], [in:] *Środowisko i warsztat ewaluacji, [Environment and techniques of evaluation]* A. Haber, M. Szałaj (Ed.), PAED, Warsaw 2008.

Development Council of the President of the Republic of Poland. He studied at the University of Łódź and at Harvard University. In 1991–1993 he worked the Office for European Integration and participated in negotiations concerning the Association Agreement between Poland and the European Union, and in 1993–1997 he worked in the Central Europe Department of the World Bank. In 1995–2002 he was the Deputy Director, and subsequently the Director of the Department of Statistical and Economic Research of the Central Statistical Office and the Polish Academy of Sciences.

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The use of evaluation in the process of designing a strategy

Designing an economic strategy is a complex operation as it should take into account all the complicated and interrelated interactions taking place within the economy. Each intervention with the use of public funds has to be economically substantiated, and since financial profits are not present in the public sector, it becomes necessary to apply the method of determining and implementing the objectives that are important to and desired by the society. Therefore, the starting point to build a strategy is to identify the needs and problems occurring in the socio-economic reality. Another aspect that also needs to be considered, is the necessity of taking into account the competitiveness on the global market and active participation in the structures of the European Union. The economic strategy arranged at the national level should be a starting point for the creation of partial strategies in individual deployment areas of public funds. Determination of objectives under an economic strategy at the national and regional level requires the application of quite diverse methods and instruments used within the public sector.[23] Obtaining and using the information that can contribute to better public funds' spending at present and in the future is a common denominator for these methods and tools. A strategy can be created on the basis of methods recommended by the European Union while taking into account the commonly applied methods of strategic management.

Strategic management in the public sector

Striving for the creation of reality in the future remains at the heart of strategic management. Both the public authorities and enterprises use a strategic approach, but in the case of public sector, it is much harder to assess whether strategic goals have been achieved. It results from the number of criteria that can be used to assess the effectiveness of a strategy, programmes and tasks implemented by the public sector.

Strategic management can be defined as achievement of objectives in the medium- and long-term perspective, both at the level of economic strategy and at the level of organisation's management. The evolution of public sector has caused that strategic management is used in reference to growing number of areas of public administration operation. It is present in the activities of both central and self-governmental authorities. At the level of central authorities, an incentive to use modern strategic management was constituted by the regulations of the European Union pertaining to Structural Funds' implementation, which impose an obligation to create national strategies.[24] The implementation of the activity-based budget in Poland also forces the commencement of the process of identifying objectives. However, in certain cases, problems concerning the determination of proper hierarchy of objectives emerge since the activity-based budget is created without prior formulation of strategic documents.

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[23] For more, see: K. Opolski, P. Modzelewski, *Jakość w usługach publicznych,* [*Quality in public services*], Wydawnictwa Fachowe CeDeWu, Warsaw 2008 (2nd revised edition).

[24] See for instance Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999.

Then, there is a risk that objectives and funds, tasks and sub-tasks will be confused with strategic objectives.

The first stage in each type of strategic management is represented by a strategic analysis. Such an analysis has to comprise both the identification of what was in the past and what is now, and should also forecast future trends and events. Specifying the time perspective that should be taken into account in the strategic analysis depends both on the specifics of the area under research and the accessibility of data.

According to the methodology recommended by the European Commission, the strategic management process in public sector is composed of: planning, programming, budgeting, identification, implementation, control and monitoring, as well as evaluation.[25] In a way, it can be said that strategic analysis is the first, yet primary or even the most essential stage of planning. The term *diagnosis* is sometimes used in such context, but it should be noted that diagnosis alone is not sufficient as it is necessary to identify and assess the probability of the occurrence of specific trends and to forecast individual parameters that can be of importance from the point of view of implementing the objectives set in the strategy. The detailed algorithm for the performance of strategic analyses and creation of strategies in the context of evaluation process is presented in Fig. 1.

According to the general definition of strategic planning, it is constituted by an adequately structured collection of mental activities and processes performed by a team of persons appointed for that purpose, who are tasked with the preparation and initiation of measures aimed at the achievement of deliberately selected future conditions of the object covered by planning.[26] In the practice of determining an economic strategy in Poland, planning means the identification of area-specific objectives at the level of the entire country. Programming consists in striving for the creation of reality by determining the economic strategy objectives. It requires that the desired course of specific processes, probable changes of conditions and expected outcomes is defined. At the stage of programming, it is necessary to build scenarios, depending on the value of selected parameters. At the stage of programming, strategic objectives meeting the SMART criterion[27] should be selected. These could be selected on the basis of: appropriate selection of persons/institutions participating in the process of programming and conduct of strategic analysis followed by negotiations of adopted solutions with stakeholders. Strategic objectives should have tools for measuring their implementation within a specified time perspective. Allocation of public funds causes a number of external effects, which should be estimated and specified in terms of quality or value at best. Due to the multidimensional nature of external effects and expected positive external effects, coordination is necessary when defining the strategic objectives. The most important entities with which one can cooperate when defining the strategic objectives are decision-making centres taking up the work on the determination of strategic documents at the central (Committees established to determine the National Development Strategy) and regional level (Committees established by Self-government Voivodeship Board).

According to the methodology of managing the programme cycle, the process of formulating the strategy takes place during the process of strategic planning. After these stages, it is necessary to proceed to the stages of identification, budgeting, development, implementation, monitoring and control, as well as evaluation. **Identification** consists in determining the potential and real methods of implementing the objectives. This means that for each strategic objective, it should be defined which methods of its implementation are admissible. **Budgeting** consists in allocating funds for objectives set at the level

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[25] Project Cycle Management Guidelines, European Commission, March 2004, p. 16.
[26] K. Porwit, *System planowania* [*Planning system*], PWN, Warsaw 1981, p. 88.
[27] Method of determining the objectives – SMART: S – Simple, M – Measurable, A – Achievable, R – Relevant, T – Timely defined.
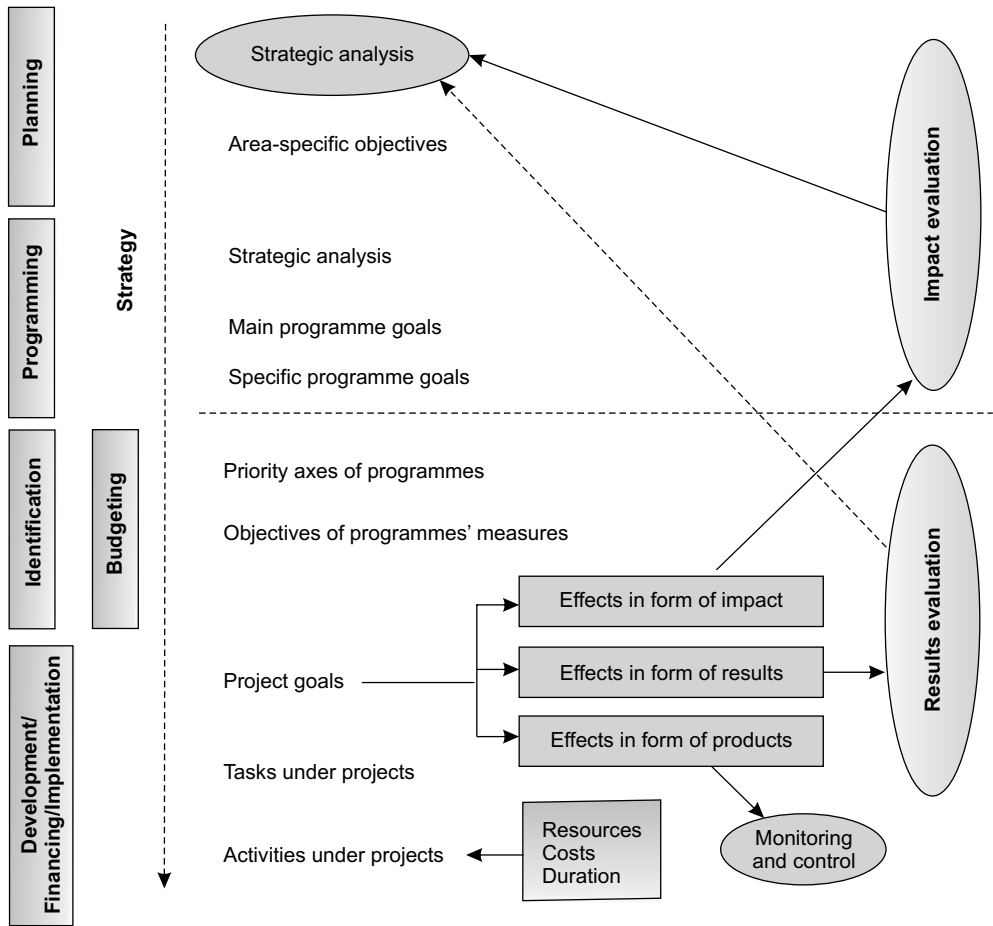
Fig. 1. Strategic analysis in the public sector vs evaluation
Source: own analysis.

of programming. At the strategic level, a problem might occur that concerns the inclusion of funds for implementation in a system which is compliant with the system applied in the activity-based budget. **Development** consists in identifying individual methods of implementing the objectives. Depending on the type of objective, it can be assigned to particular administrators of funds. It is also possible to apply the "top-down" and "bottom-up" principle alternately when developing particular objective implementation methods. The time of issuing the decision on financing of particular projects or undertakings depends on the method of proceeding. **Implementation** defines the persons responsible for the implementation of objectives and defines the implementation of objectives itself. **Monitoring and control** are related to the regular supervision over the allocation of public funds. **Evaluation** defines whether the expected effects of measures taken have occurred and also whether the designed system of creating and implementing the strategy is capable of assuring the desired effects. Because of the diversity of evaluation functions, it is applied at various stages of strategic management. In this context, one can distinguish evaluation of the strategy creation system, evaluation of the strategy itself, evaluation of the impact, evaluation of outcomes and evaluation of the objective implementation system.

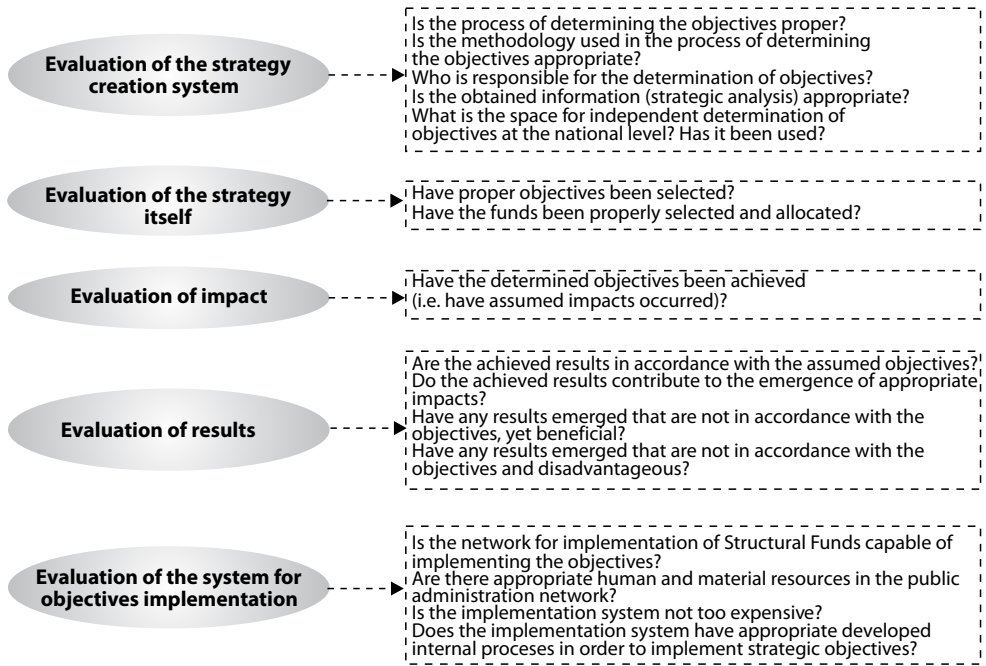| Evaluation of the strategy creation system	Is the process of determining the objectives proper? Is the methodology used in the process of determining the objectives appropriate? Who is responsible for the determination of objectives? Is the obtained information (strategic analysis) appropriate? What is the space for independent determination of objectives at the national level? Has it been used?
Evaluation of the strategy itself	Have proper objectives been selected? Have the funds been properly selected and allocated?
Evaluation of impact	Have the determined objectives been achieved (i.e. have assumed impacts occurred)?
Evaluation of results	Are the achieved results in accordance with the assumed objectives? Do the achieved results contribute to the emergence of appropriate impacts? Have any results emerged that are not in accordance with the objectives, yet beneficial? Have any results emerged that are not in accordance with the objectives and disadvantageous?
Evaluation of the system for objectives implementation	Is the network for implementation of Structural Funds capable of implementing the objectives? Are there appropriate human and material resources in the public administration network? Is the implementation system not too expensive? Does the implementation system have appropriate developed internal proceses in order to implement strategic objectives?

Fig. 2. Types of evaluation and exemplary outcomes thereof
Source: own analysis.

Evaluation of the strategy designing (creation) system

Evaluation of the strategy creation system consists in defining whether the process of determining the objectives is suitable, whether the entities (persons) involved are appropriate, whether the selected analysis parameters in the performed strategic analysis are adequate for the presented problem. It also allows for the assessment of whether or not the space for independent determination of objectives at the national level has been used in an appropriate manner. The process of determining the objectives is essential from the point of view of strategy design. This process might involve numerous problems, such as overrepresentation of entities from certain sectors of the economy or public life, commissioning of inadequate expertises, selection of inappropriate contractors for expertises, addressing the expertises in the decisions in an inappropriate manner, disputes about competences among the entities involved in the process of creating the strategy, excessive politicisation of the process of selecting the objectives agreed under economic strategy, failure to include the results of scientific research, lack of appropriate methodological framework of conducted analyses and tools used in the objective selection process. These shortcomings might result in mistakes in the selection of parameters for strategic analysis, followed by incorrect conclusions from such analysis.

The system of creating the strategy should comprise a mechanism for the inclusion of impact evaluation outcomes and evaluation of results of previously implemented programmes. Otherwise, the created strategies may turn out to be unrealistic and lacking economic substantiation. However, the process of determining the objectives must not be based only on evaluation of previously implemented programmes, but it should also take into account the experience and perspectives of economic strategies

carried out both domestically and abroad in a broader time horizon. The results of scientific research presented by experts who are able to translate these results into the practice of economic strategy in the time horizon in question in Poland while taking into consideration the forecasts and trends, including the ones taking place in the global economy is a necessary supplementation of the process of determining the objectives.

Evaluation should also cover the adopted hierarchy of objectives and coordination of individual sectors of the national economy. Therefore, the process of determining the objectives at consecutive levels under the stages of strategic planning, programming and identification should comprise the procedures for coordination of strategies implemented by various departments. This need results from the fact that coordination at a lower level might contribute to the achievement of effects that are impossible to be achieved at higher levels of the hierarchy of determining the objectives.

Strategy evaluation

Evaluation of a strategy consists in verification, whether proper objectives have been selected. The approach typical for *ex ante* evaluation is most suitable here. Evaluation carried out at this stage of strategic management covers the analysis of implementation progress for objectives of previously implemented strategies while taking into account external factors that exerted influence on the implementation of the strategy in the period in question. Since it is not always possible to rely only on experience, it becomes necessary to use forecast tools based on the analysis of internal structure of the strategy (e.g. the issue of objectives' cohesion, inclusion of alternative measures in the case of changed socio-economic context) and organisation of implementation system in a more comprehensive way. The evaluation of a strategy should take into consideration the results of the conducted strategic analysis and risk analysis, and it should present the expected results of failure to carry out measures in particular areas of strategic decisions. As a part thereof, one should also conduct tests verifying if any important factors affecting the implementation of area-specific objectives have been omitted in the process of strategy creation.

From the point of view of auditing companies, the evaluation of the strategy designing system and the evaluation of the strategy alone could be referred to as strategic audit. Strategic audit can be conducted in two stages: (1) control of correctness of the methodology used to build and implement the strategy; (2) control of outcomes: control on a regular basis, strategic control.

Impact evaluation

The practice of implementing Structural Funds requires the application of two types of evaluation: **evaluation of results** of implemented projects and **evaluation of the impact** that emerged in relation to the implemented projects. It should be pointed out that the results are constituted by immediate effects of provided products whereas the impact is connected with long-term effects of implemented projects.

Therefore, the evaluation of results is connected with detailed objectives (specified at the level of "measures" and "sub-measures") whereas impact evaluation is related to the implementation of strategic objectives included in the National Strategic Reference Framework. From the point of view of a single public administration agency, it is most important to implement overall objectives by assuring the desired impacts as high as possible, which is illustrated in Fig. 3.
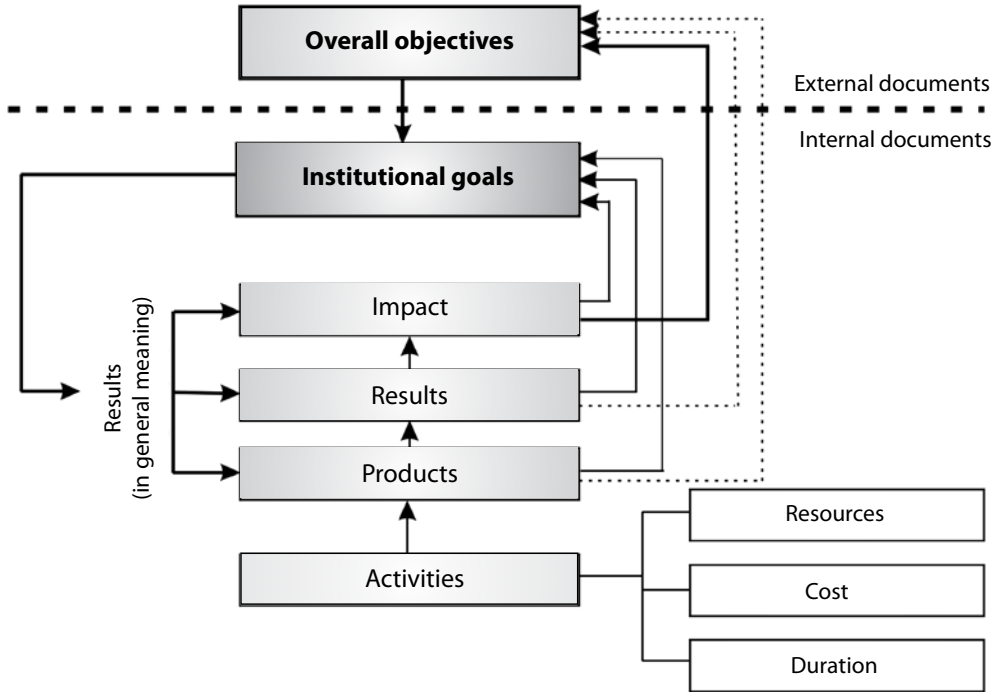
Fig. 3. Effects of intervention from public funds
Source: own analysis.

Impact evaluation should specify whether the objectives included in the strategy have been achieved. This type of evaluation can refer both to area-specific (horizontal) objectives and primary objectives as well as detailed programmes. The achievement of long-term effects lies at the heart of the allocation of public funds and, therefore, from the point of view strategic management, it is of vital importance to carry out impact evaluation. This way it is possible to verify whether the objectives of the structural policy included in the National Strategic Reference Framework are being achieved.

Impact evaluation in a broad sense will refer to all results of the State's economic strategy while taking into account the analysis of external positive and negative effects, the risk analysis or the results of failure to carry out the measures. In particular the analysis of the occurrence of negative results of the implemented strategy is still underdeveloped in Poland. For instance, the analysis of the cost of employing additional human and material resources is most frequently omitted. It applies both to the analysis at the level of economic strategy and at the level of individual organisations (public administration institutions). Similarly, risk analysis at the level of strategic objectives is omitted while the directors of public finance units concentrate on effectiveness and efficiency in organisational tasks in these units.

Evaluation of results

Evaluation of results should specify whether the results are in fact achieved and whether these achieved results contribute to impact occurrence. The evaluation of results can play an important auxiliary role in the Structural Funds' implementation system. It can be carried out at the level of single projects or

at the level of measures. In the former case, it is conducted by the beneficiary, whereas in the latter by the 2nd level Intermediate Body. Due to the fact that beneficiaries do not use uniform methodologies for the evaluation of project results, the results of this evaluation can be regarded only as auxiliary to the proper impact evaluation. However, result evaluation is extremely important as it allows for keeping the proper direction of Structural Funds' implementation. Feedback obtained from the recipient of Structural Funds should be of importance in the assessment of effectiveness of individual support instruments. Therefore, it can have the nature of an on-going or *ex ante* evaluation and contribute to a better selection of project types that can be granted co-financing. It is an intrinsic analysis of actual needs reported by the recipients of Structural Funds and of the effectiveness of projects implemented by the beneficiaries.

Evaluation of the objective implementation system

The main question related to the evaluation of the objective implementation system is whether the implementation network of Structural Funds can achieve the objectives set for these programmes. It is not only about the organisational objectives related to the functioning of the network alone. It is much more important to define whether or not it is possible to implement economic strategy objectives owing to the functioning of public institutions within the scope of Structural Funds' implementation. Hence the question whether or not the funds implementation system has developed appropriate internal processes in order to implement the objectives set under the economic strategy. For instance it means the ability to select projects that will contribute to the occurrence of impacts at the level of strategic objectives, instead of providing the products planned in programme sub-measures only.

Nonetheless, the organisational matters should also be present in the evaluation of the objective implementation system. The questions should be answered whether there are appropriate human and material resources in the public administration network, whether the Structural Funds' implementation system is too expensive or whether the implementation system has developed appropriate internal processes in order to achieve the economic strategy objectives.

The starting point for the evaluation of the objective implementation system is constituted by the analysis of public administration network that participates in the implementation of funds. However, the entities from beyond the public sector, such as non-governmental organisations or institutions and persons involved in the process of counselling, advising, creating strategies, programmes and projects (e.g. thematic networks established in order to increase the professionalism of assessing the applications for co-financing) should also be taken into account.

As a part of evaluation of the objective implementation system, it is also necessary to carry out an analysis of provisions of law that affect the effectiveness and efficiency of implementing the projects by applicants.

The evaluation of the objective implementation system may also concern other areas of public sector while taking into consideration the comprehensive nature of the process of analysing the network of public administration institutions.

It should be assumed that the conclusions from the on-going and *ex post* evaluation of the objective implementation system should be included in the process of designing the economic strategy. This could make the designed objectives more realistic. It is also exceptionally important at the stage of programming and identification. Decisions concerning the institutional structure of the funds' implementation system are taken at the programming stage, and thus the conclusions concerning the organisational effectiveness of functioning of the public administration network would be helpful during

the determination of strategic objectives, priority axes of programmes or objectives of programmes' measures and sub-measures. In addition, the evaluation of the objective implementation system can provide support for the optimisation of processes taking place within the network if inefficiencies of the system are eliminated. In the public administration network, problems might be encountered connected with the circulation of information between organisational cells or units, the scope of competences, decision-making ability of particular organisational units, complexity of internal procedures, effectiveness of managing the ongoing administrative work or work under project procedure, consistency in interpreting the provisions of law, document circulation methods, control processes, effectiveness of applying post-control recommendations and satisfaction of employees, etc.[28]

In reference to individual factors mentioned above, it is possible to define the ability of individual public administration units or elements of administration network to implement the objectives of economic strategy. Therefore, such unit may decide to assign the objectives' implementation to particular public institutions at the stage of programming and identification. Designing a strategy can be enriched to a great extent and reduce the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the Structural Funds' implementation system. Absence of conclusions from detailed institutional analysis of the public administration network in the strategic analysis may require further expensive and time-consuming system adjustments. Infrastructure, human and material resources obtained by individual institutions determine, to some extent, the stages of programming and identification in the process of strategic management. An efficiency audit should also be conducted, i.e. an examination of the expenditure-results relation at the level of various organisational units, organisational cells, measures taken, programmes implemented, as well as tasks and sub-tasks that were carried out. It would allow for a better allocation of organisational resources in the new financial perspective.

Strategic analysis

Strategic analysis is the most essential technique that can be applied in evaluation research oriented at strategic aspects of public management. It is customarily the main element of works on the creation of the strategic document since successful implementation of a strategy depends on this type of analysis. Strategic analysis should comprise both the level of the entire economic strategy and the level of public administration network or individual public institutions. Strategic analysis should encompass also critical diagnosis of the current condition, forecast of future situations, analysis of the closer and more distant environment, as well as the analysis of potential positive and negative external effects that can be connected with the implementation of the strategy (see Fig. 4). From the point of view of strategic management at the level of economic strategy, the evaluation of impact exerted by strategies or programmes carried out so far should be used. However, the evaluation of results can be used in strategic management as well. It can be useful in modifying the types of support instruments selected at the identification stage. Owing to the identification of instruments that bring expected results, it is possible to change the catalogue of preferred project types that are granted support. However, it should be done prior to the announcement of the next competition, so that beneficiaries do not lodge justified complaints concerning the projects that have not been granted co-financing as a result of modified preferences of the Managing Authority or Intermediate Body.

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[28] For more see: P. Modzelewski, *System zarządzania jakością a skuteczność i efektywność administracji samorządowej* [*Quality management system and the effectiveness and efficiency of self-governmental administration*], Wydawnictwa Fachowe CeDeWu, Warsaw 2009.

Result evaluation can for instance indicate the phenomenon of transfer of objectives, which consists in concentrating mainly on the provision of products that do not bring the planned significant effects. An example of this type of phenomenon is the provision of training for inappropriate groups of beneficiaries or construction of roads ending in an inappropriate point from the social point of view.

STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

RISK ANALYSIS

SELECTION OF STRATEGIC OPTION

Strategic analysis at the level of economic policy

Analysis of the current state of play

Forecasts and trends

Analysis of environment

SWOT analysis

Scenario analysis

Analysis of effects of failure to take measures

Analysis of sensitivity to changes of parameters used in forecasts at the stage of strategic analysis

Analysis of positive external effects

Analysis of negative external effects

Coordination of policies at the level of the EU

Coordination of policies at the national level

Coordination of policies at the regional level

Risk connected with determining and implementing area-specific objectives

Risk connected with determining and implementing strategic objectives

Selection of options that are effective and efficient at the level of economic policy

Strategic analysis at the level of public administration network

Area of management of human resources

Area of organisational structure/ structure of the public administration network

Area of internal procedures (work organisation, circulation of documents, circulation of information and internal communication)

Area of resource assurance

Area of control (control of documents, organisation of circulation of post-control management reports)

Area of IT

Area of the method for drawing up analyses/ strategic documents/ reports

Risk connected with determining and implementing management objectives at the level of public administration network

Selection of options that are effective and efficient at the level of public administration network
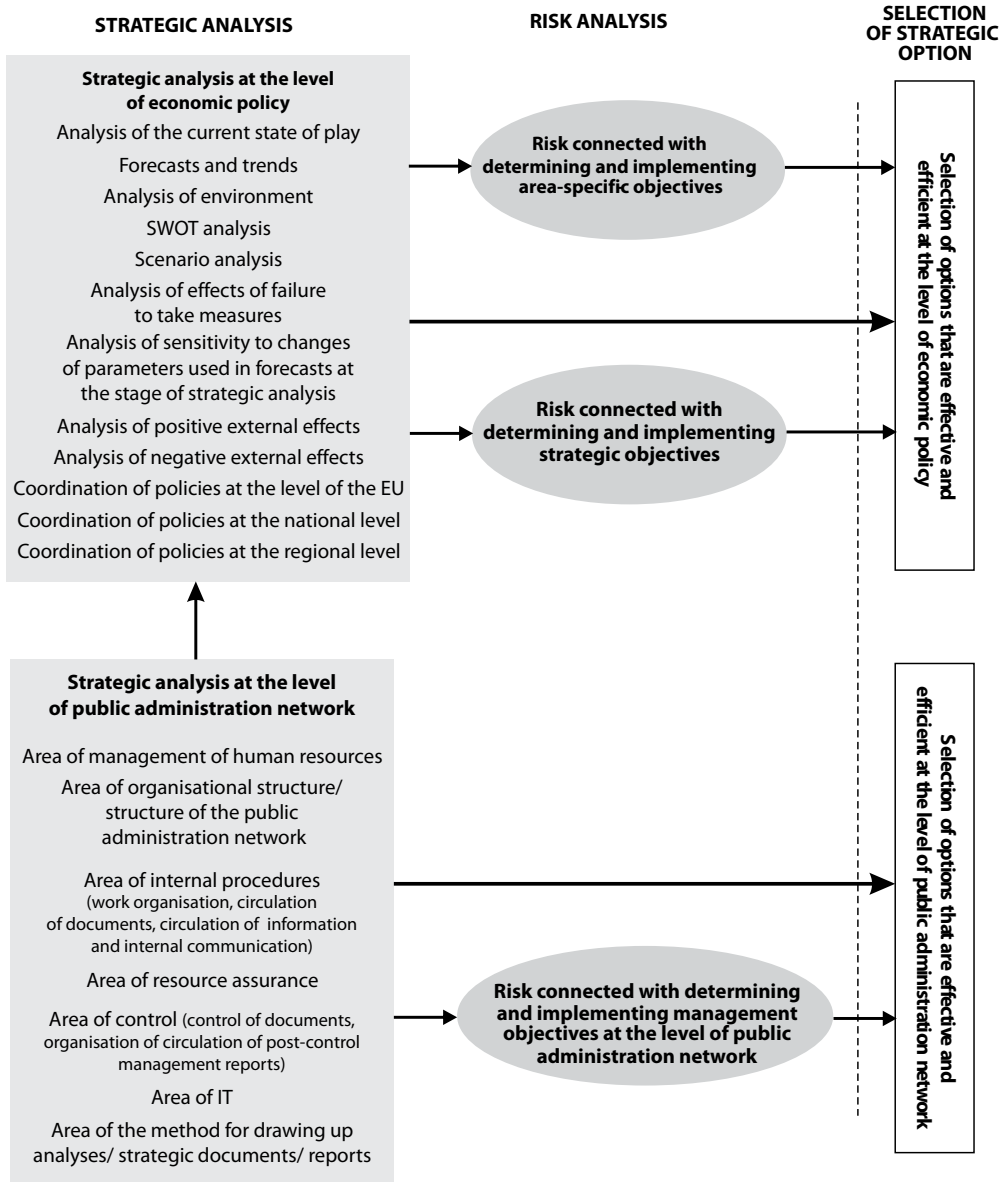
Fig. 4. Strategic analysis and risk analysis in reference to determination and implementation of specific-area objectives, objectives of the economic strategy and objectives at the level of public administration network
Source: own analysis.

Prompt detection of this type of problems in advance by means of evaluation research can provide an incentive for modification of programme documents and assure a more precise allocation of public funds for objectives desired by the society. Therefore, the evaluation of results allows for the functioning of public administration network as a learning organisation. Introducing corrections to economic strategies on a regular basis is exceptionally important from the point of view of public perception thereof. It should be pointed out that the substantive scope of strategic analysis should be dependent on the specifics of the institutions that carry it out. Implementation scenarios for various strategic options should be taken into account and an analysis of results of failure to take measures should be carried out. The diagram presented in Fig. 4 shows at which levels the strategic analysis can be conducted.

Risk analysis should be carried out in reference to determination and implementation of specific-area, strategic and management-related objectives. It is detailed in Fig. 4 due to the fact that it can be conducted both in reference to economic strategy and organisation strategy. At present, unit directors attach greatest importance to risk analysis at the level of individual procedures or administrative activities, but the provisions of the Act on public finance do not forbid risk analysis at the level of economic strategy or at the level of public administration network. As a part of management control, unit directors have to assure effectiveness and efficiency of the measures. Hence, strategic analysis should provide not only information about the options that are feasible, but also indicate the ones that will assure success. In a way, risk analysis performs the control function in the process of determining the objectives and it should be conducted in reference to strategy map that includes the relations between individual strategy objectives.

An exceptional issue consists in defining the so-called "appetite for risk", which specifies the admissible loss level or the admissible profit reduction level. For example, it can imply a situation in which minor failures do not mean a total failure and they are taken into account in the project implementation. In addition, the cost related to risk reduction can be frequently much larger than potential benefits. Therefore, it should be verified each time whether taken preventive measures are adequate for the potential loss.

At the level of public administration network, strategic analysis should include the areas of managing human resources, architecture of public administration network, organisational structure of individual network elements, as well as the areas of internal procedures, assurance of resources, control, IT or the method of drawing up analyses, strategic documents and reports on the implementation of objectives. Such an analysis makes it possible to define which options of strategic choice are possible in reference to the public administration network and which decisions optimising the functioning of this network in terms of effectiveness and efficiency are available. It is necessary also in this case to conduct a risk analysis that will enable to avoid situations where the resources are reduced at the expense of possibility of implementing superior objectives selected under the conducted economic strategy.

The most essential element of strategic analysis is represented by the analysis of environment, which can be carried out from the point of view of the entire country's economic strategy, particular regions for the needs of public administration network or individual public institutions.

In the case of analysis from the point of view of entire country's economic strategy under the analysis of further environment, the parameters for the economy of Poland and the global economy can be examined separately (see Fig. 5). In the case of Poland, one can take into account economic parameters (at the national, regional and local level), socio-cultural environment and demographics, legal conditions, infrastructure and technological environment, natural environment and global environment. In the field of analysis of economic environment, one should take into consideration parameters of the economy of Poland such as GDP growth rate (in fixed prices), unemployment rate, interest rates, consumer price

index, average annual exchange rate of PLN against USD, current account balance, capital balance, capital expenditure growth rate, dynamics of export, dynamics of import, structure of export and import, salaries in the sector of enterprises, salaries in the budget area.[29] It might be also necessary to conduct analyses of individual sectors of economy, analyses of branches or problems. This type of analysis can be continued under the analysis of global environment, where similar parameters will be examined in reference to individual countries of groups of countries. The functioning of internationals and competitiveness on the global arena should be taken into account under the analysis of global environment as well. The strategies implemented by competition in the form of countries, groups of countries, internationals or main actors in particular sectors or branches of the economy should be also considered. Depending on the adopted study structure, the research on global environment can also include the analysis of technological, economic, political and legal, socio-cultural and natural environment, as well as demographical conditions.
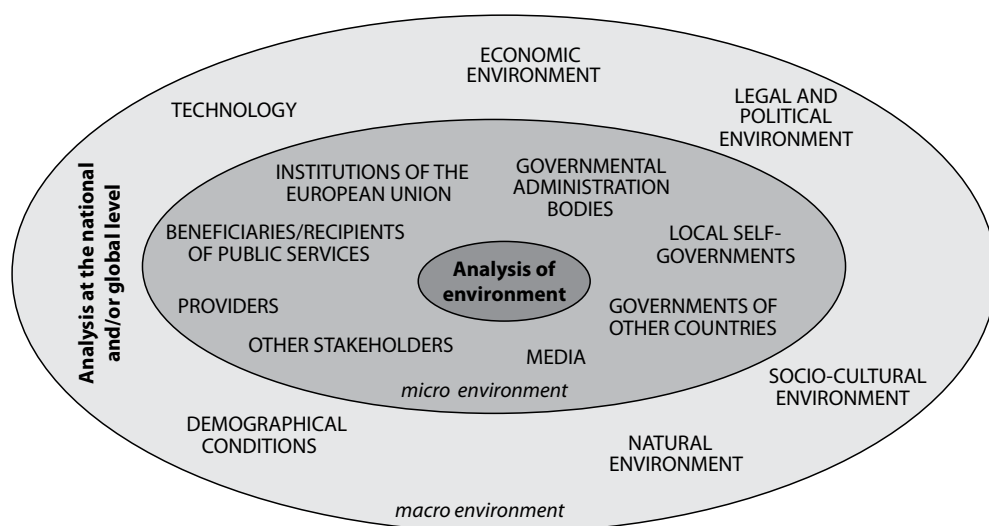

Fig. 5. Analysis of environment
Source: own analysis on the basis of: Ph. Kotler et al, *Marketing,* PWE, Warsaw 2002, p. 186–189.

In order to carry out a strategic analysis of further environment, it is necessary to define how individual phenomena in the past looked like in the time horizon that allows for the analysis of trends to be conducted and forecast conclusions to be drawn. Hence, it will depend on the area under research and the available data.

The analysis of closer environment should include institutions of the European Union, bodies of governmental administration, local self-governments, governments of other countries, suppliers, recipients of public services, media or other stakeholders. Depending on the level of conducted strategic analysis, the above-mentioned catalogue can be modified, taking into account non-governmental organisations, enterprises, environmental organisations, trade associations, etc. It should be assumed that in the case closer environment, there is a possibility of much greater impact and interaction with

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[29] *Planowanie budżetowe a alokacja zasobów* [*Budget planning and allocation of resources*], S. Owsiak (Ed.), Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warsaw 2008, p. 130.

individual entities, and hence the need for more detailed analysis and determination of the method of proceeding with each reference group. In the case of institutions of the European Union, there is a direct necessity of taking into account the EU policies in strategic planning and programming at the national level. In reference to the areas of public governmental administration, it is necessary to conduct an analysis of strategic documents (in particular strategic analyses) drawn up by particular ministries for the departments of governmental administration. Therefore, one should take into consideration the information of strategic nature from the following areas: agriculture, hunting, forestry, fishery and fishing, mining, industrial processing, production and supply of electricity, gas and water, trade, hotels and restaurants, transport and communication, tourism, housing, services, IT, science, public administration, national defence, obligatory social insurance, public security and fire protection, jurisdiction.[30] Taking into account all the departments of public administration for strategic purposes is not possible since the strategy should take into account cross-section objectives and it should constitute a starting point for the development of activity-based budget and programme documents. However, it does not mean that the planners should not have an analysis of the environment as comprehensive as possible at their disposal.

Selected areas for the analysis of environment can be covered by the conducted analysis. Determination of external effects will concern mainly economic parameters, although environmental or social effects can be estimated as well. This means that the data obtained under impact evaluation can be used in the process of strategic management in the subsequent management cycle at the level of planning and programming.

At the level of a single public institution, the analysis of environment should cover the relations with superior institutions and a catalogue of provisions of law, strategic documents and guidelines. A catalogue of stakeholders may be established that would correspond to the type of activity of a given public institution. The analysis of environment should be conducted in a similar way in the case of public administration network, while taking into consideration the interdependencies between particular network elements in relation to stakeholders.

Available tools (methods of analysis) and instruments

The tools that can be used in strategic management include SWOT analysis, Balanced Scorecard, Risk Analysis Matrix, Cost-Benefit Analysis, option analysis or scenario analysis and sensitivity analysis. Cost-Benefit Analysis can be conducted at the level of selected objectives from the point of view of country's development strategy or at the level of a single project/undertaking. Option analysis at the strategic level consists in determining the effects of using the given set of objectives with a specific level of importance of individual objectives. At the project level, it will be represented by determining, e.g., the best possible location for investment or determining the best equipment purchase option while taking into consideration the analysis of external effects (including the economic ones). Sensitivity analysis consists in verifying the way in which changes in particular parameters influence the implementation of a strategy, task, measure or project.

Strategy map is an exceptionally useful analytical tool in the process of determining the strategic objectives as it illustrates the relations between particular strategic objectives and it helps in determining the cause and effect relationships.

Having determined the objectives (or in the course of determining them), one should conduct an analysis of positive and negative external effects connected with the strategy to be designed. The process

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[30] Ordinance of the Minister of Finance of 2 March 2010 on detailed classification of income, expenditure, revenue and expense, as well as funds originating in foreign sources, Annex 1. Classification of sections.

of determining the objectives should also take into account the issues of coordinating the strategy at the level of the European Union, coordinating the strategy at the national and regional level. It implies the need to issue recommendations concerning the possibility of coordinating the strategies of various regions by public institutions (individual ministries and Offices of the Marshal). It is in so far important as activity-based budgets of particular institutions are not able to assure coordinated implementation of horizontal objectives. Therefore, it is necessary already in the process of determining the objectives to carry out planning measures covering various departments of governmental administration and taking into account the operation of regional self-governments. If there are coordination mechanisms in particular areas, the evaluation of objectives' implementation system should describe and assess them in terms of organisational effectiveness (taking into account e.g. rate of information flow, decision-making process, scope of competences of individual entities, etc.).

In addition, an analysis of citizens' preferences (both in reference to strategic objectives and to individual undertakings) can be introduced by means of qualitative research tools.

Strategic analysis at the level of public administration network should comprise the area of managing human resources available within particular network elements, areas of network's organisational structure and that of network elements, the area of internal procedures, the area of resource assurance, the area of control, the area of IT and the previously mentioned area of method for drawing up analyses and strategic documents, but also various reports that can be of importance from the point of view of the strategy under implementation.

The main difficulties connected with the use of evaluation in strategic management are related to the possibility of using the data generated during evaluation. The demand for information in the process of designing an economic strategy is very high. It includes not only the necessity of obtaining information on impacts and results of economic strategies implemented so far, but also the necessity of obtaining information on the strategy creation system, potential results of considered strategic options and information on the objective implementation system. Depending on the analysis level, it will be the entire public administration network in Poland or a corresponding fragment thereof.

Strategic management is necessary in the public sector because of the level of civilisational and socio-economic development. Contemporary societies impose high requirements on public administration. Implementation of objectives desired by the societies and assurance of prosperity for the citizens of a given country requires that decisions are taken on the basis of a wide range of information on both the analysis of closer and further environment and the analysis of the public administration itself. The strategy should take into account both the analysis of the current state of play and the trends in the global economy. Forecasts require the use of expertise and research results, both domestic and international. In strategic management perceived this way, the evaluation of domestic strategies is of utmost importance since it allows for the assumptions and hypotheses to be translated into specific measures. It takes place already at the level of *ex ante* evaluation where scientific research results and domestic and foreign experience are used for the purpose of designing an economic strategy. On the other hand, *ex post* evaluation allows for the selection of these options of the strategy that are real and can contribute to the greatest extent to effective and efficient use of public funds.

It is still to be determined whether or not it is possible to arrange the composition of the team and the network of external experts, so as to allow for the development of a strategy that assures success of the economic strategy in the long-term. Multitude of needs and conflicts of interests of particular social groups may hamper the process of determining the objectives. Problems are also caused by the fact whether it is possible to fully anticipate the external effects in a dynamically changing world and to adjust them to the new challenges in advance. It applies to investment in both fixed assets and in the

development of human resources. Structural adjustments of the economy are possible only in medium- and long-term periods, and thus it is so important to take into account the results of evaluation research. They may make it possible to save time and resources that could be irreversibly wasted if wrong strategic decision is made.

It is beyond any doubt recommended for a strategic management system to strive for as complete use of opportunities provided by the evaluation of impacts and results as possible. It is necessary to determine such measurement methods that could be used in a long-term perspective due to very high costs connected with the measurement of individual parameters.

How can evaluation contribute to strategic management?

Evaluation is essential for successful strategic management in public sector. It is true both in reference to the conduct of economic strategy and to the management of an organisation.

Forecast of a strategy necessitates the inclusion of numerous assumptions in relation to the factors that might affect the implementation of that strategy. These factors can be divided into several groups according to the probability of their occurrence. A separate division can be made in reference to the scale of impact exercised by these factors. The analysis should also include a description of factors that are regarded insignificant in the implementation of a strategy since they can be added to the analyses later in the course of strategic reorientation (they might turn out significant from the point of view of implementing area-specific objectives for instance). The complexity of the world makes it impossible to predict all the results at particular levels of determining the objectives, but comparable and reliable data obtained during evaluation research can facilitate strategic management both at the level of economic strategy and at the level of public administration network.

Ex ante evaluation can be helpful in anticipating potential external results that are expected in the case of using particular support instruments. On-going evaluation gives hope for the possibility of conducting strategic reorientation in advance. *Ex post* evaluation makes it possible to define the strength of relation between particular categories of intervention and the planned effects relatively precisely and to provide information useful from the point of view of future strategic documents. The use of all the available types of evaluation allows for performing better forecasts for the measures included in strategic management of a country and organisation and for better implementation thereof. **Therefore, a properly organised evaluation system is of major importance not only from the point of view of public institutions' efficiency, but – above all – from the point of view of contemporary development policy, whose effects will determine the opportunities and living conditions of the citizens of Poland in the coming decades.**

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Agnieszka Haber, Maciej Szałaj

Evaluation of organisation and strategic management

Introduction

Public institutions, which for centuries had enjoyed a sure position of monopolists, today are forced to compete with both private entities and other public agencies. Examples of such competition are observed both at the State and regional or local levels. For many countries, especially less developed ones or affected by economic or political upheavals, the adequately high position in agency ratings or as high as possible a position in rankings of investment attractiveness is often crucial for their wellbeing. Local self-governments strain to achieve the highest possible indices of the quality of life. Regional authorities carry out, independent from the State, diplomatic and lobbying activities oriented at getting attractive investment, locations of seats of prestigious offices, or rights to organise sport events (e.g. Olympic Games, large-scale football tournaments) and cultural (e.g. the status of the European Capital of Culture).

On the other hand, unprecedented mobility of capital, human resources and services, provides the modern citizen with wide opportunities enabling a choice and a change not only of the daily purchased goods, but of lifestyles, professions and jobs, and dwelling. Low quality of living in a city or a region constitutes therefore a serious risk of the outflow of "the best clients" (taxpayers), i.e. better educated and earning citizens, and, in consequence, of companies which use the highly skilled personnel, and whose taxes constitute a major part of the income of a local self-government. Unfavourable legal or fiscal policy may effectively discourage potential investors and seriously influence the unemployment figures. Lost opportunities may lock a country or a region in the trap of stagnation for long, which in practice means constant peripheral position in the global economy.

The above phenomena, characteristic of contemporary public organisations, place us in the context of different quality from the quality of the present classical theory of management or, from the context of contemporary knowledge on the State and its institutions. Weber's paradigm of public administration, concentrated on constant structures and mechanical application of legal norms, becomes more and more outdated today. Public administration, for which stable form and current issues constitute core values, does not have the ability to successfully respond to the needs of citizens or to provide adequate conditions for the development of a State, a city or a region. If we concentrate on prevailing, we are able, assuming, that we base our activities on sufficiently grounded procedures and we have sufficient measures at hand, to solve the present critical situation (e.g. social anxieties, calamities) and provide basic public services (police protection, national defence, health care). We will not be able, however, to conduct long-term activities as a part of **long-term goals**. We will not be able to react in a flexible way to the unavoidable changes of social and economic context. As a result, we will be bound to fail in competition with those, who understand challenges of contemporary times better and are more efficient in adaptation of their organisation and activities to these challenges.

Skilful strategic management is indispensable today for correct management of an organisation, and for successful implementation of public policies in any sector and at any level (local, regional, national, European, global). It should be pointed out, though, that the ability of strategic

management stretches beyond reflection on vision, mission, advantages and disadvantages, finally, strategic priorities. Developing these elements constitutes a prerequisite of strategic management, however, it is a tip of an iceberg in terms of the activities necessary to achieve the set objectives. Strategy is a process taking place in the context of a specific organisation and providing a specific direction for the said organisation. Documents on shelves, proudly labelled "the strategy", are merely the final stage of conceptual works, which should be followed by the implementation process. Only the successful completion of the implementation is a sign of success. While implementing a strategy, one must decide about the direction they want to choose, but at that stage two difficulties appear. First, one needs to determine how to achieve complex goals and, what is even more difficult, achieve those goals.

Implementation of a strategy requires creation of an **adequate organisational background**. Such a background must consist of **physical and non-physical assets**. The key challenge in this perspective is creation of an efficient **system of information and management of knowledge.** It enables steering an organisation in changing internal and external conditions and monitoring progress. In the public administration's case a necessary component of the system is evaluation of organisation as an information-providing practice of unique character and with large potential of use.

New management paradigms – new generations of evaluation

Evaluation of organisation originates from two paradigms: **1) strategic management** paradigm (the paradigm of dynamic character of research and analyses of organisation, ways of acting, its processes and relations and activities based on learning and knowledge management) and **2) fourth generation evaluation.** Popularity of evaluation consistent with the above discipline is a response to the difficulties of contemporary managers and decision makers in public organisations. One should ask about the qualities of a contemporary organisation which are crucial for this popularity. It seems that the key importance should be attributed to what has previously been signalled, i.e. the fall of the myth of universal organisation model.[31]

As a result of transformations of the 1960s, new, numerous approaches appeared in the domain of organisation and personnel management (the school of HR), which infiltrated also the public management area. However, none of the above achieved a position which could be compared to the one of the Weber's model at a time. Ongoing globalisation, growing dynamics of change and complexity of tasks made people aware that literal adaptation of theoretical models is not possible in practice. Managers of big organisations discovered to what extent their activity has been influenced by such paradigms as planning, benchmarking, total quality management, cultural specificity of particular States and regions, organizational culture, reengineering, ethics and corporate social responsibility, organisation networks, learning organisation and knowledge management, core competence, competing on capabilities, resource-based view of the firm etc.

Growing awareness of the above problems contributed to the rise of **the necessity of individual programming of an organisation to achieve specific goals**, even in case of one-time initiatives. Contemporary management trends find their way, albeit reluctantly, to public institutions, too. The key role is played in this context by the **New Public Management** paradigm.

An important change brought by the NPM was questioning of basic differences between a public and a private organisation. As a consequence, research (including evaluation) concerning public sector started to actively use the marketing and organisational solutions. The activity of public institutions was

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[31] Compare P.F. Drucker, *Zarządzanie XXI wieku – wyzwania* [*21st Century Management – challenges*], Rzeczpospolita – seria „Klasyka biznesu", Warsaw 2010, p. 18–26.

evaluated against the citizens' satisfaction with the quality of the services they provide. Thorough analyses of financial efficiency of the public sector were also conducted. The development of NPM stimulated evaluation of organisations. Evaluators' interest shifted from a simple assessment of effects to supporting the development of an effective (responsive to citizens' needs) and rationally spending administration. Confronted with the increasingly significant trends, public organisations of the 21st century started to use the knowledge and the tool to get it – evaluation.

The fourth generation evaluation, which was mentioned above, is a concept of classical work by Guba and Lincoln.[32] Following generations of evaluation research should not be considered, though, in separation from the wider context of social and economic changes. Subsequent generations of evaluation are wrongly regarded as fashions or results of influence of particular research paradigms. In reality, subsequent waves of evaluation resulted from the trends, which led to redefining of organisation's specificity, and, what follows, reconstruction of the whole public management theory.

The first generation of evaluation is inscribed in the paradigm of measurement. Its scope of evaluation surveys did not exceed quantitative determination of implementation of the set goals. This was the time of development of research on education, which was oriented toward measuring knowledge and abilities on the basis of unified tests. Evaluations of this generation did not intend to explain complex nature of processes or individual specificity of particular cases (e.g. students, teachers, schools). One might say that first generation evaluation was an echo of Fordism with its concentration on mass approach, standardisation of products and services and regarding quantity as the main factor of a business success.

The **second generation** developed in 1940s and 1950s. The paradigm was description oriented. Second generation evaluation not only aimed at measurement of the state of affairs, but at grasping relations between observed effects and activities undertaken as a part of the evaluated intervention. An example of such an analysis is cost benefit analysis, which identifies measurable (financial)effects of the undertaken activities. While the first generation evaluation was considered the emanation of Fordism, the second generation was related to the dramatic increase in the share of public expenditure, which was started by the anti-crisis policy of the 1930s.

Another, third generation evaluation was shaped at the beginning of the 1960s. It is known as **judgement evaluation**. Approaches of this generation set the still popular model of evaluation survey, which includes, apart from measurement and analysis of results, also the assessment of the adequacy of adapted goals and recommendations concerning future activities. In this case origins of organisation evaluation (processes) may be identified. Third generation evaluation was related to dynamic development of social sciences, whose methods increasingly attracted business managers. Consulting services developed dynamically in post-war decades. Counsellors used scientific methodology as a tool to become credible for knowledge-based Western societies.

The last, fourth generation distinguished by Guba and Lincoln, was undoubtedly a result of social upheaval that changed the face of Europe and America in 1968. The period, known as "cultural revolution", dramatically changed social life and, as a result, also patterns of organisational management and rules which organized public and economic space. The fourth generation evaluation, so-called responsive or constructivist generation is strongly influenced by the trends in humanities which were originated by the "revolution". This generation of evaluation assumes lack of objective explanation to social reality and contextual links between all activities and meanings. Hence evaluation based upon this paradigm goes **beyond the analysis of influence mechanisms** (expenses – activities – objectives) **toward subjective evaluation** provided not only by an institution, but also by beneficiaries of a programme, civic society

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[32]   E.G. Guba, Y.S. Lincoln, *Fourth Generation Evaluation*, Sage Publications, London 1989.

institutions, or generally understood public opinion (so-called interest groups). The effect of such an analysis is presentation of results in forms adapted to specific needs of particular groups of recipients. Official logic of the programme is not treated as an obligatory reference point, hence results are assessed through various criteria based upon values identified in the process of assessment (interest groups' perspective). Fourth generation is often considered a result of distortion of scientific objectivism, due to the fact that its development was relative to a specific social movement and its ideology. As it is inspired by the new humanities' methods, it is also regarded as a paradigm of "supporters of qualitative approach", i.e. the researchers lacking qualifications to use quantitative analysis methods. Such opinions should be deemed one-sided. It is true that the fourth generation evaluation tends to contain elements of the ideology of the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s. In some cases, quoting this paradigm is aimed at concealing the theoretical deficits of the evaluator. It should be pointed out, though, that fourth generation evaluation, similarly to the previous ones, was influenced by pragmatic premises. The changes of the late 1960s resulted in new forms of management, civic activity or expectations and needs related to public institutions. These consequences could but influence the approach to evaluation. The new paradigm enabled to include hitherto unknown research problems and provided an opportunity to address new, previously unknown, information needs.

Evaluation of organisation – specificity of approach

For over 20 years strategic management **has sought answers to basic questions**: *what are prerequisites for organisation's success, how the resources of a company are organized and managed, how the organization reacts to changes in its environment, what the process of strategy building consists of and what role creativity and innovation have to play, what are strategic consequences of the most significant decisions about mergers, activation or disintegration,*[33] **and is searching for areas and concept which significantly influence the success of a strategy.** Short history of strategy from design, i.e. what the company can do (what are its strengths and weaknesses), to what is possible to achieve (environmental opportunities and threats)[34] through the approach of Michael E. Porter of "selecting the right sector", based upon the paradigm of industrial enterprises' economics, structure-conduct-performance, now reached the point of key competence, competition of skills and resources – concentrated on analyses focused on the organisation. We have reached the moment, when strategic management assumes, that the sources of competitive advantage are to be sought within the company.

Strategic management requires constant future orientation from managers and constant monitoring of ongoing tendencies. In the world of constant change, public organisations, similarly to entities active in private sector, should be constantly vigilant, but also prepared to other rounds of activities. **A good strategy requires constant monitoring of both the scope of activity and two key dimensions – market conditions (market context and competitive environment) and the way of organising and using the organisation's resources.**

Evaluation may support the process of seeking answers to basic questions concerning determinants of an organisation's success, and may demonstrate how market forces and internal processes determine competitive advantages and value of assets (physical and non-physical). By involving evaluation in the process, we encourage managers to see the organisation both from the inside and from the outside. We make them aware that truly valuable (competitive) assets are rare and even the organisations which possess exceptional assets or skills cannot be sure of success. To achieve it, aware management is necessary, through, first of all, joining them with other assets and, second of all, their inclusion in procedures and activities which set the organisation apart on the market, thirdly, through

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[33] K. Obłój, *Pasja i dyscyplina strategii* [*Passion and discipline of strategy*], ed. Poltext, Warsaw 2010, p. 19.
[34] Theory of Keneth R Adrews.

observation of their depreciation (in time, due to changing market conditions, expectations and needs of clients, and the activity of competition).

Evaluation of an organisation is used in various forms and at various stages of strategic management. It supports both the stage of designing strategy (diagnosis, development of strategic documents), at the implementation stage and after its completion, at summing up of the results.[35]
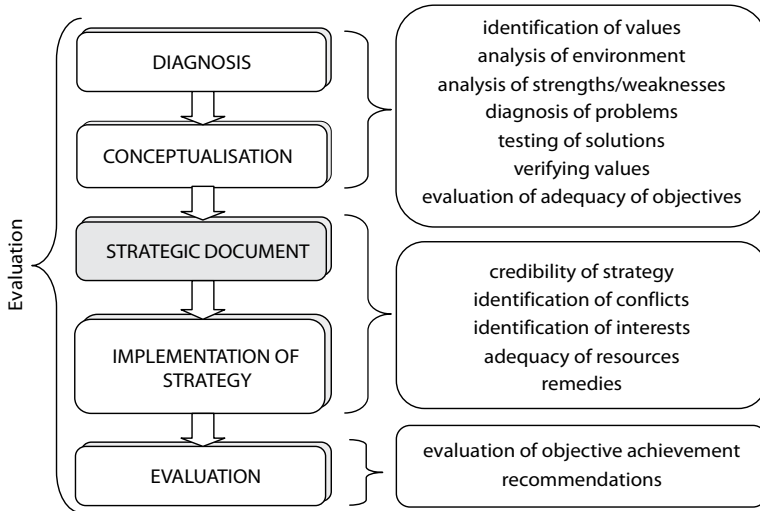

Fig. 1. Evaluation in strategic management

Source: own analysis.

Types of evaluation which may contribute to strategic management may be distinguished against the moment of execution: ex-ante, on-going and ex-post. Yet another typology should be pointed out: effect-oriented and process-oriented evaluation. Evaluation of organisation represents the second type.
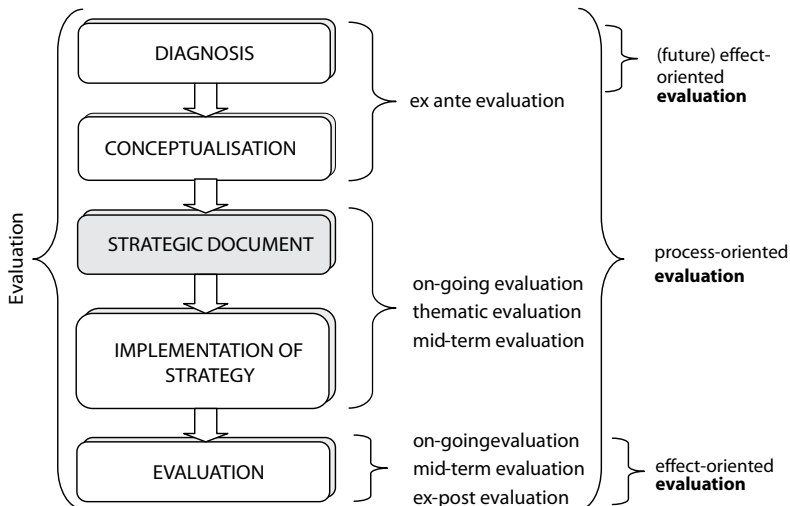

Fig. 2. Types of evaluation in strategic management

Source: own analysis.

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[35] See chapter K. Opolski, P. Modzelewski, *Zastosowanie ewaluacji w procesie projektowania strategii* [*The use of evaluation in the process of designing a strategy*] p. 23–37 of the present volume.

Evaluation in this form, contrary to the "traditional" form, does not relate directly to the effects of the programme or measure. From the point of view of strategic management, the use of organisation evaluation enables moving behind control and cognitive functions typical for effect measurement. **This is the tool which may be useful in designing, implementation assessment and modification of a strategy.** Evaluation of organisation provides answers which go beyond adequacy of assumptions or level of achievement of objectives. Such an approach results in support of setting of the optimum way of task implementation. Evaluation helps overcome all the main difficulties of strategic management – setting of the strategic objectives, the way of implementation and the implementation itself (through warning against the risk of defeat and indicating adaptive measures and remedies).

To conclude, we may distinguish following features characteristic for evaluation of organisation, which distinguish the discipline against other evaluative activities:

- focus on the unique character of the investigated institutional context (a distinguishing feature against evaluative research),
- orienting analyses on the assessment against the criteria resulting from the objectives set for a given undertaking, e.g. project, programme or a chosen public policy and on developing recommendations (distinguishing feature against organisation research).
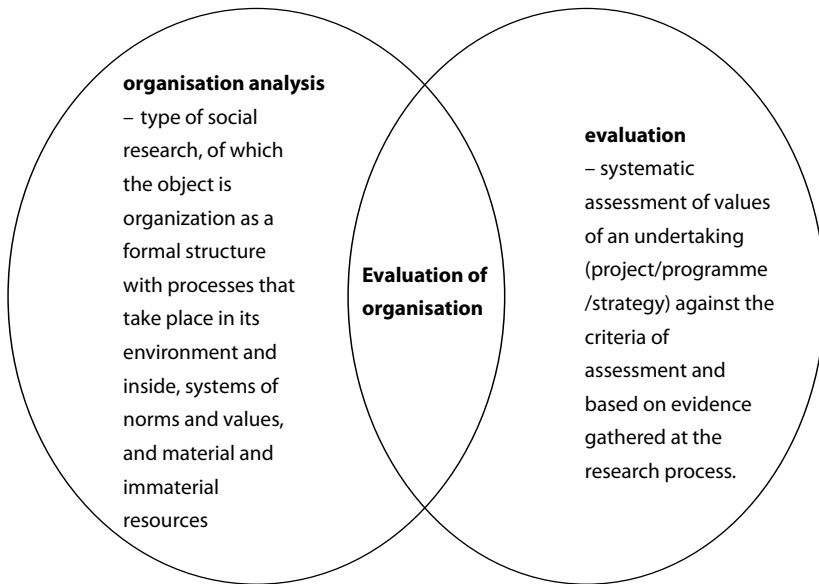

Fig. 3. Evaluation of organisation and related disciplines
Source: own analysis.

Evaluation of organisation – application conditions

The recommendation for using public organisation evaluation in strategic management is difficult to apply. This is firstly due to the fact that so far the approach has been inhibited by factors such as **high generalness of guidelines for evaluation application and effectiveness**; secondly, there was **an excessive amount of evaluations without any feasible good recommendations, lack of application standards and lack of the ability to recreate the sequence of actions**, which must be taken to obtain the useful knowledge. Thirdly, the modern organisations are **mostly not reflective** and **inflexible to**

changes. **Fourthly, institution financing and accounting is performed mostly in a short time** perspective. **Fifthly,** procedural-correctness-based management is dominant, with low importance of goal-based management.

In order for evaluation to become a valuable tool for the organisation and the strategy building process, a number of boundary conditions must be met:

1) **Environment favourable to evaluation** I.e. environment favourable to assessment, reflection, self-analysis, learning, but also openness to new ideas, new solutions and ongoing modification of actions.

2) **Specific processes, procedures and practices for obtaining knowledge via evaluation.** Useful evaluation[36] never arises on its own. Many specific steps and widespread actions[37] must be taken within the entire process of knowledge creation, collection, analysis and distribution.

3) **Leadership strengthening management processes through knowledge and change.** The cultural dimension alone (favourable environment) and the implemented processes and procedures are not enough. It is necessary to engage high-ranked managers in the key stages of the evaluation process: initiation and partial designing of the evaluation, result collection, preparation and implementation of recommendations. Their participation is to produce results aimed at specific information needs, but also to stimulate the reflective action habit, based on knowledge, analysis, evaluation and thought-out recommendations.

Furthermore, the following is necessary:

1) **systematic collection of information** on both own activities and their results, as well as those of the customers, potential service purchasers, economic and social trends, competition and organisations best in their class;

2) **systematic analysis**, enabling the identification and discussion of the base assumptions and results of the evaluation, which may affect decisions of strategic importance;

3) **possession of knowledge transfer systems**, with access for key decision makers (necessary for the creation, implementation and evaluation of strategies) and for low-ranked employees (facilitating the performance of everyday tasks).

4) **systematic education** of employees (of all ranks) in terms of both strategy and evaluation, not only for teaching the ability to use both of the tools, but also the enable the conscious answer of participants and managers to the elementary question of their feasibility, usability and the possible need for their utilisation.

Creating a strategic management environment

If the abovementioned conditions are met, the creation of a strategic management environment (organisational or infrastructural, constellation of relations within the organisation and with key external entities) may be supported by evaluation, in e.g. the following dimensions: **organisation mapping** (processes, structures, communication), **standard implementation** (organisation coding), **indicating a direction for changes and development**, **evaluation of relations**: client-organisation / employee-organisation / stakeholder-organisation.

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[36] More on the subject: K. Olejniczak, *Mechanizmy wykorzystania ewaluacji* [*Mechanisms of using evaluation*], Scholar, Warsaw 2008.

[37] More on the subject: Haber A., *Zarządzanie badaniem ewaluacyjnym – perspektywa zlecającego* [*Managing an evaluation study – the perspective of commissioning party*], p. 212–230, [in:] *Teoria i praktyka ewaluacji interwencji publicznych* [*Theory and practice of the evaluation of public interventions*], K. Olejniczak, M. Kozak, B. Ledzion (Ed.), Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warsaw 2008 and Haber A., Szałaj M., *Kapitał społeczny – warunek i efekt udanych ewaluacji* [*Social Capital – prerequisite and effect of successful evaluations*], p. 91–105, [in:] *Środowisko i warsztat ewaluacji* [*Environment and techniques of evaluation*], A. Haber, M. Szałaj (Ed.), *Ewaluacja publishing series*, PAED, Warsaw 2008
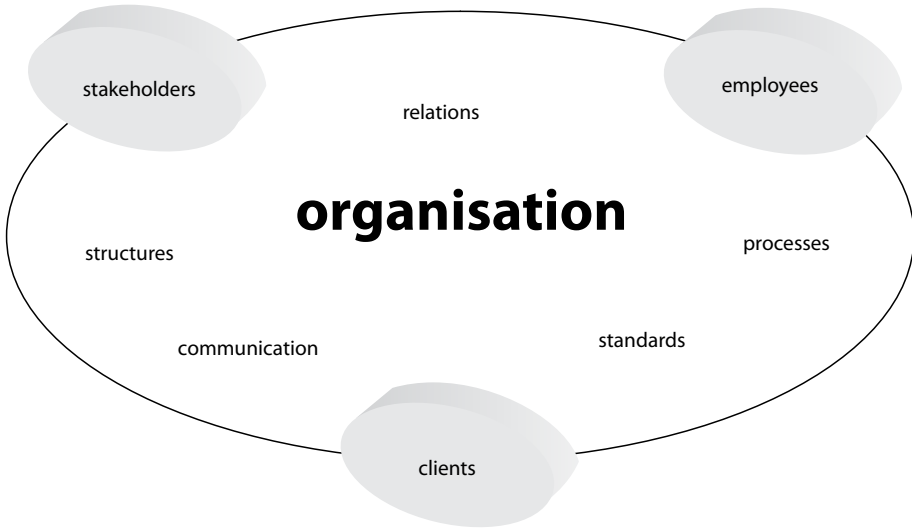
Fig. 4. Key dimensions for the evaluation of the strategic management environment
Source: own analysis.

An example of this type of study is organisational culture research. Its object is the broad spectrum of issues related to the values of a given organisation (company, institution) and the norms and formal or informal procedures. The use of organisation study elements in evaluation allows for the mapping of organisations in terms of strategic assumptions. It allows for the evaluation of the cohesion of the strategic goals with the organisation's values. This aspect should be considered as one of the key aspects for the appropriate strategy environment. Evaluation performed in such a scope performs the function of the first test, conducted at the concept works stage. Its results are a significant support in decision making, allowing for the appraisal of the matching of the strategy with the specifics of a given organisation and the decision on the implementation of changes or even the withdrawal from implementing specific ideas or projects due to nonconformity with the standard and value system of the given entity.

Evaluations using organisation learning process analysis models play a similar role. In Poland, one example of such an approach is the MUS model (Ministerstwa Uczące Się – Learning Ministries), developed by the EUROREG team of the Warsaw University.[38] The model is, in fact, a form of mapping organisations in precisely specified external environment locations, capitals (of material and immaterial resources), information gathering processes, knowledge management and activity effects. From the point of view of a strategy building environment, the most interesting feature of the mentioned model is the perception of individual dimensions as "connected vessels". It is assumed that any deficits or risks observed in one affect the others. Such a holistic approach allows for a concise characterisation of the environment, comparing its strong and weak points, as well as listing the most important threats to the success of the strategy.

The creation of a strategic management environment also requires the assurance of appropriate quality of relations with stakeholders and clients (service recipients, programme beneficiaries). Meeting the expectations and needs of those groups is in the long-term a necessary condition for the success of any undertaking, regardless of the industry branch or sector (private or public). It is then necessary to

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[38] The MUS model – more in: EUROREG Reports and Analyses 4/2010, *Polskie ministerstwa jako organizacje uczące się* [*Polish Ministries as learning organisations*], Centre for European Regional and Local Studies, Warsaw University, Warsaw 2010.

"program" (standardise) the actions of persons and organisational units, which come into contact with clients and stakeholders. The evaluation of an organisation may support the standardisation process through evaluation based e.g. on the mystery shopper method. Evaluation using this method delivers information allowing for the evaluation of adherence to standards. The results of mystery shopper evaluation (often referred to as auditing) may also be directly applied in personnel management, providing basis for assigning motivational bonuses (for upholding the highest standards), or in extreme cases – for imposing sanctions.

Another example of a research-based approach that an evaluation may use to contribute to the forming of organisation-clients and organisation-stakeholders relations is satisfaction evaluation. They focus on the opinions on the quality of the delivered services and the evaluation of contacts with the representatives of the evaluated institution or their partners. This evaluation, if possible, should combine the quantitative approaches (e.g. satisfaction polls) with qualitative methods, extending beyond simple declarations, exploring concealed attitudes and opinions. This will produce on the one hand quantitative data ("satisfaction bars"), allowing us to observe the dynamics of the analysed phenomena and the degree of attaining the assumed goals. On the other hand, it grants us knowledge allowing for in-depth knowledge of the values structure of our clients and key partners, as well as the hierarchy of their needs and expectations of our organisation. This kind of knowledge cannot be underestimated and should constitute a necessary contribution to strategic management, from initial conceptual works to the preparation of summary reports.

A noteworthy research approach is image evaluation. The way in which a company is perceived, i.e. its image and brand, are a company's resources – just like its employees' intellectual capital, its financial assets, premises or technical infrastructure. A definite majority of commercial organisations (especially large, international companies) performs routine assessments and observations of their image and the image of their managed brands. In practice, this type of research is very rarely conducted in public institutions. Their lack is a severe threat to the effectiveness of strategic management. Public institutions are often confronted with negative stereotypes regarding the quality of their services and the level of customer service. Not knowing or ignoring these stereotypes is hardly a remedy. Knowing them is a necessary condition for appropriate formulation of the organisation's vision and mission. Finally, well-recognized image issues are essential for the creation of a favourable strategic management environment. Without the knowledge of this area it is impossible to properly design an external and internal communication system (the way in which a company is perceived by its own employees is also part of its image), and to subsequently manage it.

Conclusion

Strategic management has multiple dimensions, challenges and pitfalls. It should be noted, however, that while evaluation may significantly support the strategic management process (during all of its stages), it will never replace the experience of managers and will not relieve them of making decisions on the directions of organisation development, or specifying its goal hierarchy. Evaluation may doubtlessly play the role of a navigation system, informing about changes in the environment, but cannot play the role of an "autopilot", directing the actions of the decision makers.

We hope that both through this article, as well as through the articles prepared for this year's volume, we inspired You at least remotely to reflect upon the possibilities of utilising evaluation in the context of strategic management in your institutions, and that we demonstrated a new spectrum of evaluation application in your everyday business activities.

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Part II

Evaluation in the assessment and designing of strategies – methodological aspects

Marek Maziarz, Tomasz Piekot, Marcin Poprawa, Grzegorz Zarzeczny

Evaluation language

1. Introduction

In accordance with the communication science, evaluation has to be called "the blurred genre".[39] This means that evaluation is a heterogeneous phenomenon with no distinct borders, created as a result of infiltration of various life spheres. The hybrid character of evaluation may to some extent underlay the situation described by K. Olejniczak. On the one hand, Polish evaluation research is being dynamically developed both in terms of number and quality. On the other hand, "it is addressed to the small public, its results are published in media and do not become the subject of public debate, and the conclusions are poorly used".[40]

The author quoted above also described the complex reasons for the unproductiveness of evaluation research. At present, we are interested in the last link of this complicated chain – communication on research. The hypothesis of this text is as follows:

> **the improper way of writing about evaluation research hampers the use of its results and conveying the conclusions to the public.**

Hence the paper discussed the communication ineffectiveness of evaluators and institutions commissioning the research. It is possible that the ineffectiveness is the result of the above-mentioned "blurring". In this case, communication problems may result from the disorientation of researchers-evaluators performing several social roles at a time, who are forced to use various types of language.

It should be noted that the basic domain of evaluators is science. Their typical roles are *an expert* and *a teacher* while the dominant styles are – scientific and popular scientific. The commissioning institutions, however, act in formal and legal context. Therefore, their typical roles cover the role of an *official* and *a contractor* (styles: *official* and *legal*). There are also other reasons for the unclear interpretation of evaluation research, especially: power and political context (relation: *government – citizen*, directive and propaganda style), economic context (*employer – employee*) and media context (*experts – journalists*).

The described communication problem may consist in the fact that scientists, performing all these roles, not always know how to adjust their language to the present context. As a result, the recognised

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[39] C. Geertz, *Blurred Genre: The Refiguration of Social Thought,* [in:] R. Nycz (Ed.), *Postmodernizm. Antologia przekładów* [*Postmodernism. Translation Anthology*], Baran, Suszyński, Kraków 1996, p. 214–235.

[40] K. Olejniczak, *Rola ewaluacji w krajowych politykach publicznych – analiza systemowa lat 1990–2010* [*The role of evaluation in national public policies*], [in:] A. Haber, M. Szałaj (Ed.), *Ewaluacja w strategicznym zarządzaniu publicznym* [*Evaluation in strategic public management*], PAED, Warsaw 2010. See also: M.C. Alkin, *Evaluation Essentials. From A to Z,* Guilford Press, New York 2011; K. Olejniczak, *Ewaluacja programów publicznych* [*Evaluation of public programmes*], 2008 [multimedia presentation]; K. Olejniczak, *Jakość raportów ewaluacyjnych* [*Quality of evaluation reports*], 2010 [multimedia presentation]; K. Ekiert, *Ewaluacja w administracji publicznej. Funkcje, standardy i warunki stosowania* [*Evaluation in public administration. Functions, standards and conditions for application*]; B. Ciężka, *Przewodnik do autoewaluacji projektów realizowanych w ramach Inicjatywy Wspólnotowej EQUAL* [*Guidebook on autoevaluation of projects implemented under the Community Initiative EQUAL*], Cooperation Fund Foundation, Warsaw 2005; *Standardy Ewaluacji Polskiego Towarzystwa Ewaluacyjnego* [*Evaluation standards of the Polish Evaluation Society*], 2008.

researchers do not completely find themselves in the role of evaluators. Their troubles, however, are not connected to content-related or methodological issues, but to the communication ones.

One of the basic skills of a good evaluator is the ability to communicate effectively with the varied audience from a non-scientific background. There are two particularly significant groups of recipients. The first one covers high-level officials and politicians (decision-makers) who are supposed to make specific decisions on the basis of the results of evaluation research. The other one is the group of expert (e.g. economic and political) journalists reporting the results of evaluation research to the rest of the society.

To put it simple, it may be assumed that journalists and decision-makers are the model recipients of evaluation reports. What is more, although representatives of both groups speak different languages (styles) and perform different social functions, they have more in common than differences. Both journalists and decision-makers:

- have little time to read reports,
- need the same most important information on the research (goals, conclusions and recommendations),
- are not scientists,
- have similar education and language skills.

Both groups (decision-makers and journalists) have significant influence on the usefulness and effectiveness of evaluation. The research results will not be disseminated or translated into the specific measures without the appropriate communication strategy since it will not be possible for the assumed recipients to acquire them (due to the lack of time and specialist knowledge). Therefore, it is necessary to adopt an effective and communicative writing style tailored to the requirements set by decision-makers and journalists. This style should be above all characterised by simple, fast and compact messaging of the most important information on the conducted research.

Of course it is possible to empirically verify the above hypothesis on the uncommunicative character of the evaluation language. Research covering ca. 300 Polish evaluation reports of 2002-2010 (3/4 of all texts) was conducted. One general research question was formed: **what is the level of communicability of these documents?** The following issues were the subject of interest:

1. Is the language of the reports adjusted to the level of non-expert recipients' competences (mostly decision-makers and journalists)?
2. Does the structure of the reports make it easier to acquire the results and make decisions?

2. Description of research

Corpus methods[41] and textometric tools[42] were used in the research on the communicability of the reports. The collection of the reports was divided into three groups. The first one consisted of research initial summaries (SUMMARIES), the second one – all analytical chapters (ANALYSES), and the third one – conclusions and recommendations (RECOMMENDATIONS). The forth sub-corpus was formed of separate summary leaflets (LEAFLETS)[43] based on the reports. Such division enabled to compare the

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[41] See M. Stubbs, *Words and Phrases: Corpus Studies of Lexical Semantics,* Blackwell, Oxford 2001; B. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, *Podstawy językoznawstwa korpusowego* [*Basis of corpora linguistics*], University of Lodz, Łódź 2004; P. Baker, *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis*, Continuum, London 2006.

[42]   See M. Piasecki, *Polish tagger TaKIPI: rule based construction and optimization,* "Task Quarterly" 11/2007, p. 151–167; A. Przepiórkowski, *Poliqarp: przeszukiwarka korpusowa dla lingwistów* [*Poliqarp: corpus browser for linguists*], [in:] A. Duszak, E. Gajek, U. Okulska (Ed.), *Korpusy w angielsko-polskim językoznawstwie kontrastywnym. Teoria i praktyka* [*Corpora in English-Polish contrastive linguistics. Theory and practice*], Universitas, Kraków 2008, pp. 398–426; M. Miłkowski, *Developing an open-source, rule-based proofreading tool,* "Software: Practice and Experience" 40(7), 2010, pp. 543–566.

[43] Evaluation corpus (EW) consisted of over 7 million text words, including: ANALYSES – 6,482,006 text words, SUMMARIES– 367,092, RECOMMENDATIONS – 439,603, LEAFLETS – 11,237 text words.

communicability of different parts of the reports. Because it was assumed that the language of summaries, conclusions, recommendations and leaflets should be much more intelligible than the scientific parts – i.e. analyses (see Fig. 1).
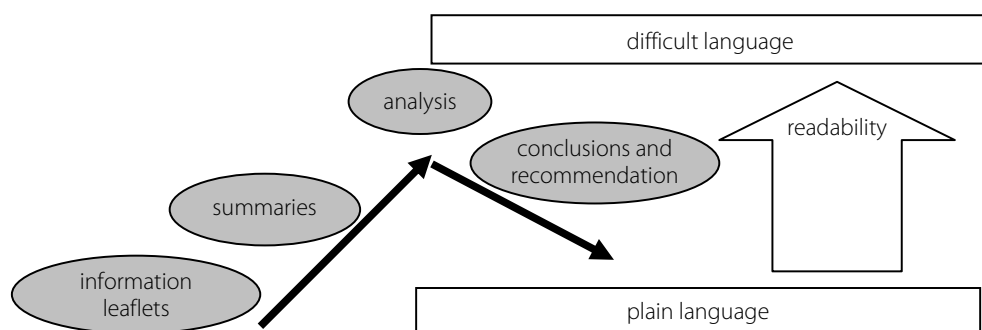

Fig. 1. The accessibility of language of different parts of the report (perfect model)

The model was adopted as a result of realistic estimate of the situation. Decision-makers (officials, politicians) and journalists have no time (and often also competences) to read the whole evaluation report. They usually confine themselves to reading the information leaflet and summary of the report. Thus stakeholders are indirectly informed about evaluation – not on the basis of the whole reports but their summaries. This adopted indirect communication model including experts and specialists has been functioning for a long time in large companies and corporations. Lately, it has also been used in public administration, media and foreign evaluation research. Summaries written specially for decision-makers are called executive summaries.[44] They are mainly aimed at providing the most important information crucial for making fast decisions (Fig. 2), and not full and chronological content of the report.
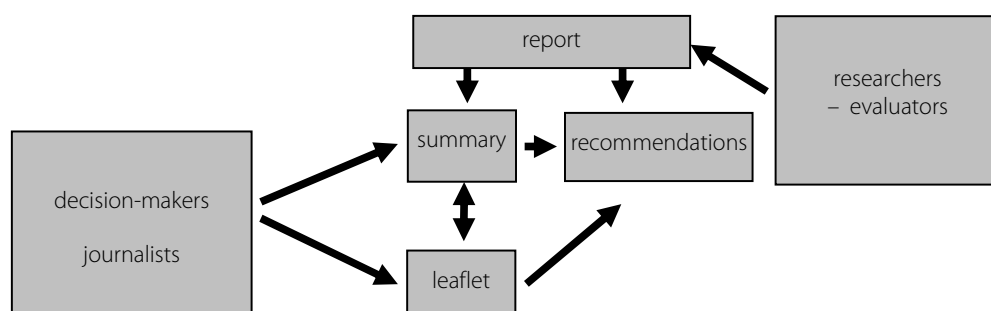

Fig. 2. Information flow after evaluation research

Reports prepared by evaluators were compared with other corpora of public texts (selected in accordance with special criteria) in terms of language intelligibility. These were (the abbreviated name of the corpus is given in parentheses):

• corpus of texts on European Funds [EF] prepared on commission of the managing authorities, similar to evaluation reports in terms of content,

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[44] See M.C. Alkin, *op. cit.;* L. Whittaker, *About Executive Summaries; Writing Guide: Executive Summaries.*

- corpus of scientific texts [SS&H] in disciplines characteristic to evaluators,
- corpus of press text on evaluation [PRESS-EV] written by journalists on the basis of the studied reports,
- corpus of elite press texts – "Rzeczpospolita" daily and "Newsweek" weekly, representative for opinion--forming press [ELITE PRESS],
- corpus of tabloid texts, representative for popular press [TABLOID],
- corpus of texts presenting everyday Polish language (spoken by a typical Pole) [EVERYDAY POLISH].[45]

Thanks to the additional corpora, language of the reports was in the network of points of reference and, thereby, accurate comparative research was enabled. The particular subject of interest was whether the level of communicability of the reports has impact on: EU grant discourse and administration language, scientific style and style of newspapers articles (Fig. 3).
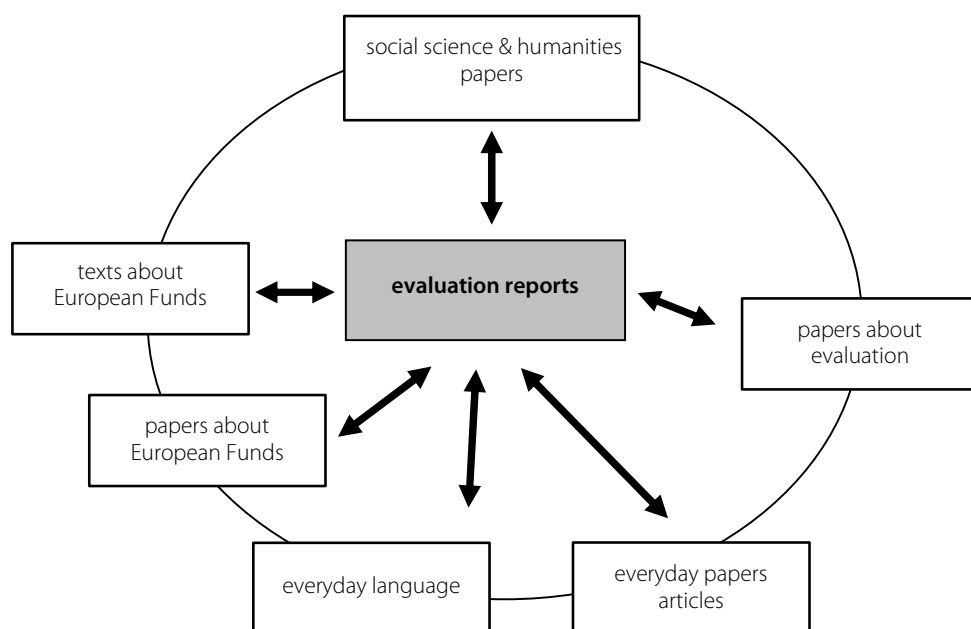

Fig. 3. Evaluation reports in the comparative corpora network

3. Communication challenges

One may ask: what does it mean "to speak/write in a communicative way"?

Intelligibility of public statements and documents is one of the greatest challenges to be faced by public speakers. It is worth to emphasize that the present global approach to this issue is changing. More and more often the social elite comes to a conclusion that educational activities should be accompanied by a change of public language with the view to make it clearer for each and every citizen. Such action often becomes an institutional and systemic issue, i.e. the simplified language is introduced via appropriate social campaigns or even legal regulations. What is worth to be emphasised, is the fact that

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[45] The volume of the respective sub-corpora was as follows (in the number of words): EF – 540,678, SS&H – 102,864, PRESS-EV – 380,968, ELITE PRESS: "Rzeczpospolita" – 19,823, "Newsweek" – 7,696, TABLOID – 8,770, EVERYDAY POLISH = Corpus of Frequency Polish Dictionary (Kurcz et al., *Słownik frekwencyjny polszczyzny współczesnej* [*Frequency dictionary of contemporary Polish*], IJP PAN, Kraków 1990) – 549,135.

they are aimed at significant simplification of the level of text difficulty and at development of techniques of providing information in a fast and effective manner to all citizens – regardless of their education and communication skills.

At present, there are two global trends in public sphere supporting this objective.

The first one is the need for preparing and disseminating the simplified version of a national language, i.e. Plain Language standard, in public communication.

The other one, is the need for searching for new, more effective and simpler forms of providing visual information.

Both these strategies – i.e. plain language and information visualisation – are aimed at increasing the rage of recipients of mass contents and including each citizen to the public sphere.

For the above-mentioned reasons, a demand for language simplification and introduction of the principles of effective visualisation applies also to evaluation research. Of course, this article does not discuss the issue of data visualisation. However, let us take a closer look at matter of communicability of various types of public sphere statements.[46]

4. Communication – adjustment to the recipient

One of the most important and basic techniques facilitating intelligibility is the adjustment of a text to the recipient's discourse. At the level of an individual statement this phenomenon is manifested as a stylistic feature called readability. A readable statement is the one that does not focus reader's attention at a perceptive (sensory) and formal level and enables fast and smooth transition to the semantic level (creating sentences, paragraphs and global meaning).

There are many factors of text readability. The following parameters were selected for the research of evaluation reports:

1. Length of paragraphs – a surface topographical feature measured with the average number of words in a paragraph.
2. Vagueness of a text – measured by the Gunning FOG index.[47] This index estimates the years of formal education needed to understand the statement. The Gunning formula includes the following detailed variables:
    1. length (difficulty) of the sentences – measured with the number of lexemes in a sentence,
    2. general number of words in a text,
    3. number of difficult (long) words.
3. Lexical similarity – means the degree to which the word set of a text is similar to the vocabulary of any comparative text (corpus).
4. Verbal/nominal style index – expressed in the ratio of nouns to verbs.

This model assumes that texts about evaluation research (reports, leaflets, etc.) should be sufficiently readable in order to be read effortless, i.e. adjusted to skills of decision-makers and journalists, and preferably – typical Poles, in terms of the above-mentioned parameters.

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[46]   The basic problem to be dealt with in Poland while developing the Plain Language standard is the adaptation of its rules to the specifics of Polish language. This text will focus on one of the parameters of communicability – intelligibility. High intelligibility of a text is an initial condition for effective communication and, thereby, development of a simplified language.

[47]   R. Gunning, *The Technique of Clear Writing,* McGraw-Hill, New York 1952.; see B. Broda et al., *Trudność tekstów o Funduszach Europejskich w świetle miar statystycznych* [*Difficulties in texts on European Funds in the light of statistical measurements*], "Rozprawy Komisji Językowej" [*Considerations of Language Commission*] 38, 2010, pp. 23–40.

5.   Are evaluation reports readable? – Evaluation discourse against public communication

Paragraphs length

The first feature determining the level of text readability is the length of paragraphs. Evaluation texts should be similar in this matter to texts read/written by the presumed recipients. In this case evaluation reports are well-assessed. Paragraph length (measured with the number of words) is almost the same as in newspaper texts on evaluation. Therefore, as for the surface level one may say that evaluation reports are edited in a readable manner, i.e. they consist of short paragraphs, many lists and specifications and, thus, do not resemble scientific texts.
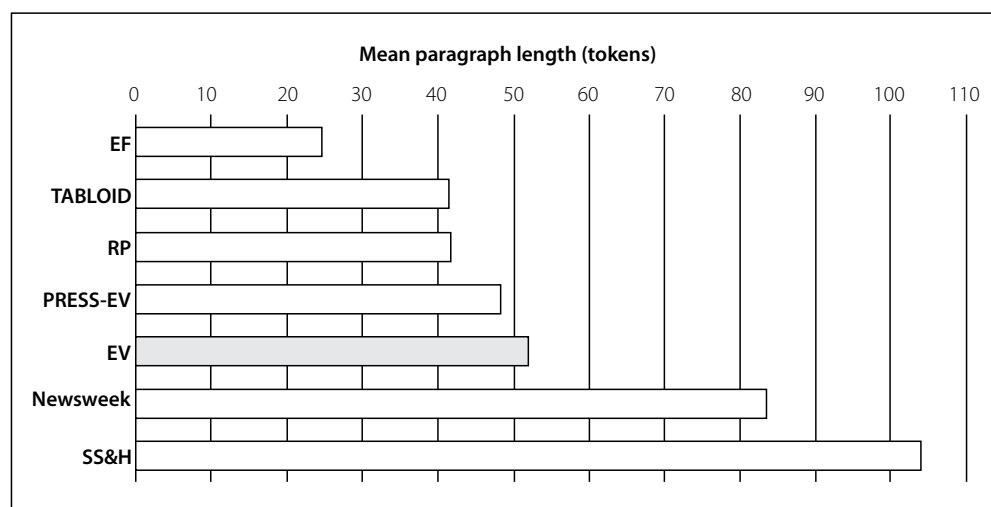

Fig. 4. Paragraph length in evaluation reports and comparative corpora. EF = European Funds, EV = evaluations, PRESS-EV = articles about evaluation, SS&H = social sciences and humanities, RP = „Rzeczpospolita" (ELITE PRESS), TABLOID = „Fakt"

Lexical similarity

Next parameter determining text readability is the similarity of vocabulary used therein to that known and used by recipients. In this case there are two extreme points of reference. One is the commonly known general Polish vocabulary, the second one – specialist and complicated scientific vocabulary. According to the lexical similarity analysis, evaluation reports' vocabulary is equally unlike the scientific style vocabulary and general vocabulary. Evaluation texts lexis is close to the vocabulary of texts on European Funds at the lexical similarity chart (see Fig). How this fact should be explained? – In terms of words, evaluation discourse is identical to grant discourse, i.e. style of texts on European Funds. There are no visible impacts of either general Polish language or scientific style. These results prove – at least at the lexical level – the phenomenon often referred to as eurojargon. In accordance with the chart below, journalists writing about evaluation (PRASA-EW) know how to avoid the eurojargon and they come close to the general newspaper style in terms of vocabulary.
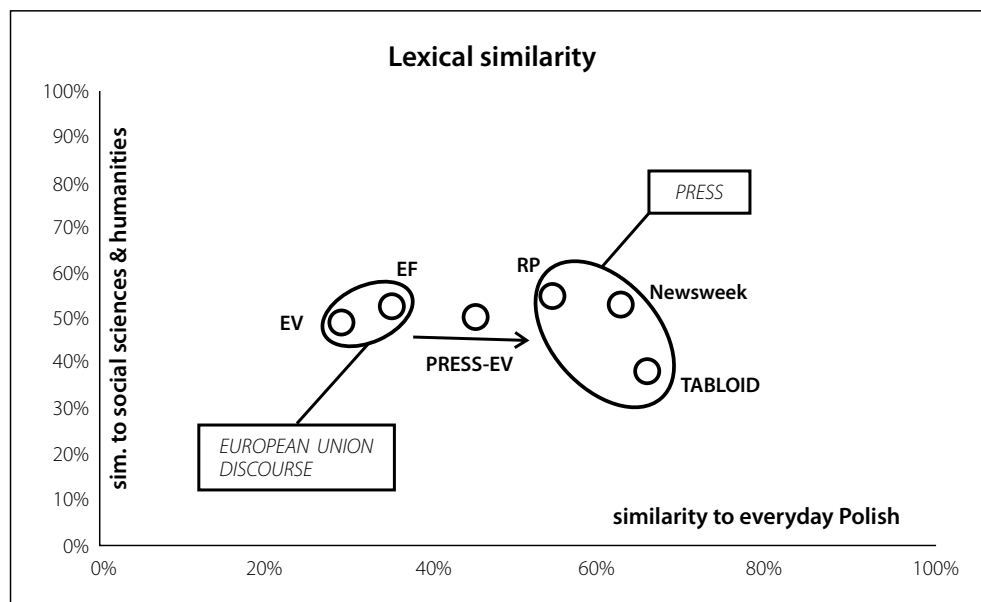
Lexical similarity

(chart axes: y-axis "sim. to social sciences & humanities" 0%–100%; x-axis "similarity to everyday Polish" 0%–100%. Labels: EV, EF, PRESS-EV, RP, PRESS, Newsweek, TABLOID, EUROPEAN UNION DISCOURSE)

Fig. 5. Similarity of reports and comparative corpora to the scientific style and general Polish

Vagueness of a text – FOG index

One of the most important indices of text readability is the level of vagueness (FOG index). It is significant for several reasons. First of all – the FOG index is a comprehensive index, i.e. it includes both lexical (vocabulary difficulty) and syntactic (sentence difficulty) features. Secondly, thanks to the Gunning formula one may predict reading skills of the text recipient (determined by the years of education).[48]

As a result of comparing the level of vagueness of various corpora one may state that the Polish evaluators address their reports to their own scientific community. High FOG index (17) proves that the model recipient of these texts is a person whose education lasted 17 years. At the same time, it may seem that the **non-readability of evaluation texts is not dependent on the difficulty of subject thereof**. It is rather the matter of one of the manners of scientific style – artificial intellectualisation and language complication (according to the principle "the more complicated, the smarter"). This thesis is confirmed by the comparison of evaluation reports and articles about evaluation written by journalists. Conclusions are interesting: journalists – while writing their articles on the basis of the reports – know how to "render" them into the simple everyday newspaper language. As a result, the FOG index is significantly lower (12).

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[48] Measures of text difficulty based on the sentence length and ratio of difficult words were criticised as oversimplified and naive. See A. Bailin, A. Grafstein., *The linguistic assumptions underlying readability formulae: a critique,* [in:] "Language and Communication", 21, 2001, pp. 292–299. Despite that, they are still considered as useful to estimate the real text difficulty. See A. Davies, A. Irvine, *Comparing test difficulty and text readability in the evaluation of an extensive reading programme,* [in:] M. Milanovic, N. Saville (Ed.), *Performance Testing,* Cognition and Assessment, CUP, Cambridge 1996, p. 170. These refer to the idea of the average recipient, and enable the definition of text readability without the need to perform expensive experiments See G. Fulcher, *Text difficulty and accessibility: reading formulae and expert judgement,* "System" 25/ 4, 1997, p. 501. It seems that lately – in accordance with neuropsychological research – FOG and related formulae should be rehabilitated: long sentences and long or rare words extend the process of understanding a text. See O. Hauk, F. Pulvermüller, *Effects of word length and frequency on the human event-related potential,* "Clinical Neurophysiology" 115, 2004, pp. 1090–1103; H.J. Haarmann, K.A. Cameron, *Active maintenance of sentence meaning in working memory: Evidence from EEG coherences,* "International Journal of Psychophysiology" 57, 2005, pp. 115–128; B. Penolazzi, O. Hauk, F. Pulvermüller, *Early semantic context integration and lexical access as revealed by event-related brain potentials,* "Biological Psychology" 74, 2007, pp. 374–388.

Unfortunately, one may suppose that the adjustment of difficult information from the reports to readers' language (non-experts) takes a lot of time.

It is worth to review the two components of the FOG index more closely: length of sentences and ratio of long (difficult) words.
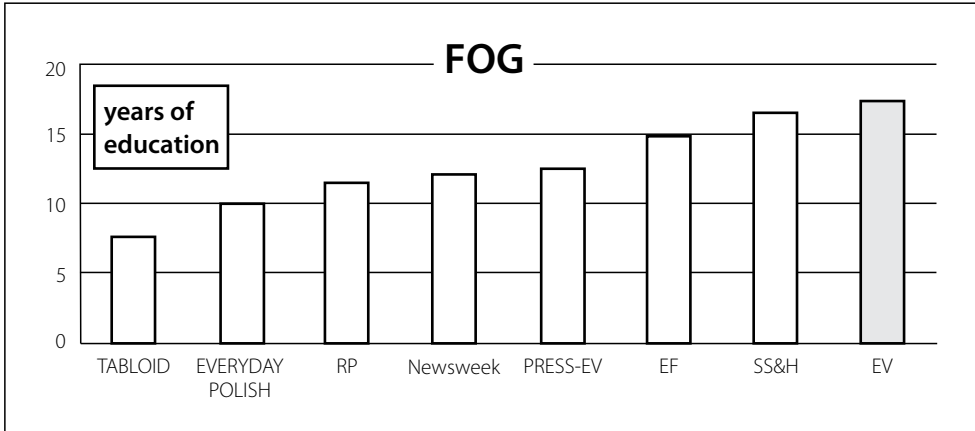

Fig. 6. Vagueness of language of reports and comparative corpora. EVERYDAY POLISH = Corpus of Frequency Polish Dictionary
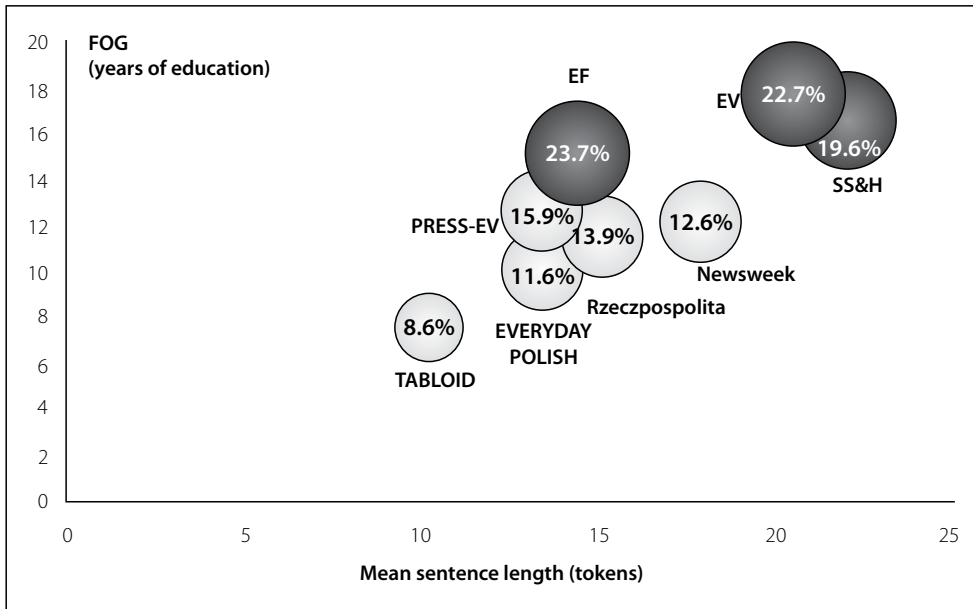

Fig. 7. Fraction of difficult words in dependence of FOG and mean sentence length (in white – verbal style, in black – nominal style; fraction of difficult words – in percentages)

In accordance with data presented at the chart, vocabulary of evaluation texts is even insignificantly more difficult than scientific vocabulary (22.7% and 19.6% respectively) and resembles texts about European Funds (the vocabulary of which is the most difficult of all our corpora! – 23.7%). However,

as far as sentence length is considered, evaluation texts are typical for scientific texts (22 and 23 words respectively in the average sentence). What is significant about texts of the highest FOG index (FOG above 15) is their nominal style (see below). Clearer texts (FOG below 15) are characterised by verbal style.

Nominality of style

The last parameter determining text readability is the so-called nominality of style. It is specified on the basis of the ratio of two parts of speech: verb and noun. In everyday communication, spoken language, the balance is maintained: one noun per one verb.[49] In written texts, there are more nouns. In difficult texts – written in nominal style – the ratio is significantly disturbed: there are 4 to 7 times more nouns than verbs.[50]
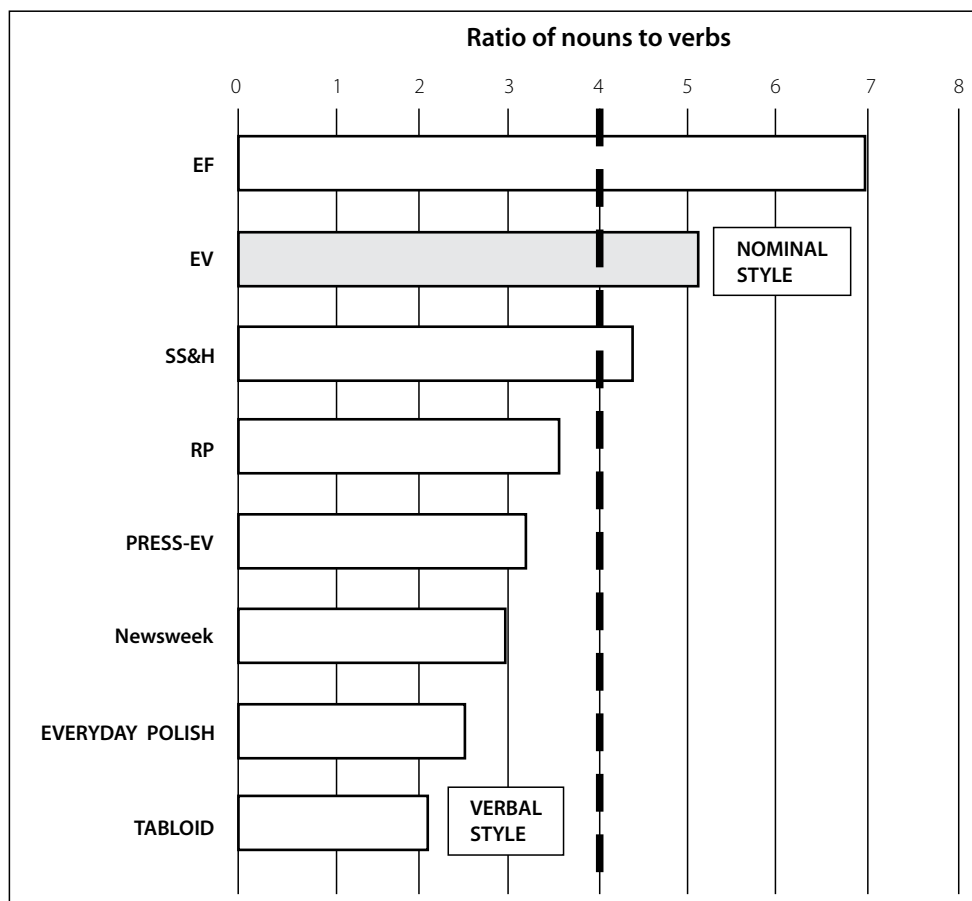

Fig. 8. Nominal and verbal styles of comparative corpora

[49] In spoken conversation Polish language verb slightly predominates over noun (N/V = 0.80), while there is more nouns in Polish telephone dialogue language (N/V = 1.40). In Polish drama and radio plays, i.e. in written Polish close to the spoken language, ratio of verbs to nouns is almost perfectly balanced (N/V = 1.01). See J. Ożdżyński, *Mówione warianty wypowiedzi w środowisku sportowym* [*Spoken variants of utterances in sport environment*], Ossolineum, Wrocław 1979, p. 61; I. Kamińska-Szmaj, *Różnice leksykalne między stylami funkcjonalnymi polszczyzny pisanej analiza statystyczna na materiale słownika frekwencyjnego* [*Lexical differences between functional styles of written Polish language. Statistical analysis on the basis of frequency dictionary*], University of Wrocław, Wrocław 1990, pp. 136–137; M. Marciniak (ed.), *Anotowany korpus dialogów telefonicznych* [*Annotated corpus of telephone conversations*], EXIT, Warsaw 2010, p. 67.
[50] Kniaganinowa M. , W. Pisarek, *Język wiadomości prasowych,* [*Language of press news*], OBP, Kraków 1996, p. 21.

As one can see, all journalistic texts are written in communicative verbal style, while texts on European Funds and, to a lesser degree, scientific texts are written in difficult and unclear nominal style. Unfortunately, in this case evaluation reports are again most similar to texts on EF and, thus they are unreadable for an average reader.

Diversity of evaluation language

As stated above, decision-makers and journalists are not able to insightfully read an entire evaluation report under the contemporary model of evaluation. This means that the burden of information about research and results thereof (including recommendations) falls on the executive summaries. This concerns, first of all, summaries, conclusions and recommendations, as well as information brochures that, due to their executive function, should be written in a simple and communicative, yet precise language.

How does it look like in the Polish evaluation research? Are the mentioned strategic genres actually written in a simpler and more communicative language?

To answer this question, we have divided the main corpus into 4 independent sub-corpora. Let us recall: the first one comprised of report summaries, the second – analyses, the third – conclusions and recommendations, the fourth – information brochures. Comparison of the language used in these fragments allows for an assertion that evaluators, when writing a report, do not change the language, meaning that they edit it at a constant (high) level of difficulty (see Fig. 9). This means that both summaries and brochures, as well as recommendations are not adjusted to perception capabilities of assumed recipients (decision-makers and journalists). What is more, a trend is even noticeable towards insignificant increase in text difficulty as regards the synthetic and consolidated parts (just like in the case of summaries or recommendations).
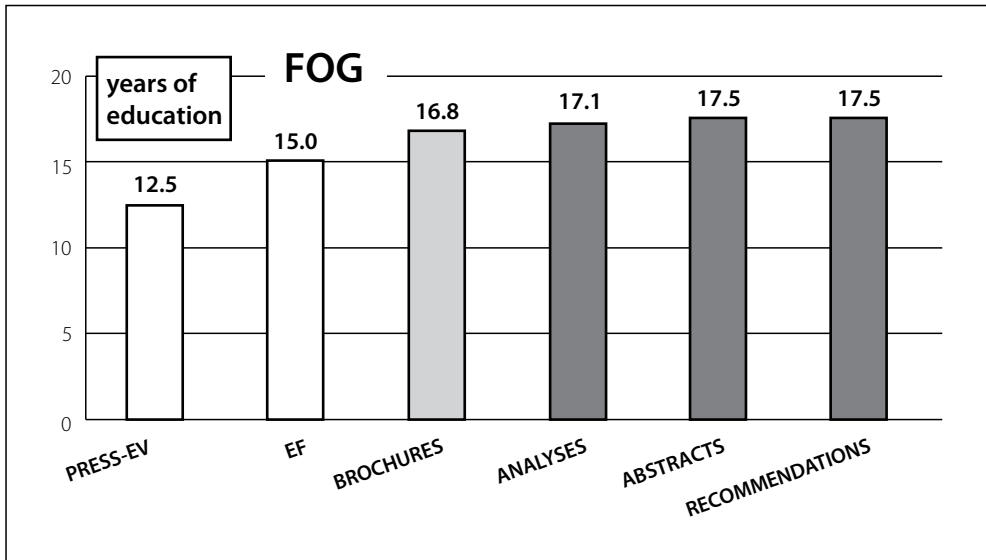

Fig. 9. Comparison of the level of vagueness of various report parts and comparative corpora

Summary

Detailed comparative research confirms the hypothesis about the hybrid nature of evaluation research. So far, Polish evaluators have not adjusted their style to the level of recipients. Few positive solutions are only superficial (they apply to the division of the text into paragraphs). In terms of syntax (structure of sentences), they do not differ from scientific texts, and as regards vocabulary they resemble difficult texts on European Funds (written in the so-called eurojargon). A typical recipient of this type of messages is a person with scientific competences (FOG > 17). This condition is fulfilled by the researchers themselves and – due to vocabulary – officials specialising in the issues of EU subsidies. Two representative examples are as follows. In the first one, the sentence is to extensive (43 words!). In the other, the sentence is unnecessarily broken by digressions and subordinate clauses.

At the same time, it should be concluded that most of these indicators are not directly connected with the indicator system for individual Operational Programmes that should be structured in a manner allowing for their full operationalisation and use thereof in current monitoring and during evaluation research already at the evaluation and mid-term stage.

It seems important for the monitoring of programme's implementation to cover, beside the values, also the level of total investment expenditure, including the level per employee, and/or the absorption level for EU funds as regards individual priorities and individual years.

Another disturbing trend is also noticeable in Polish evaluation texts. The authors of reports do not make the language easier at places decisive as it comes to the efficient use of research results. The language used in summaries, recommendations and information brochures is as complicated and unreadable as the one used in the analytical part. The failure to use simple language, and what is more important, the inability to write clear and synthetic summaries and recommendations in such a style can cause inefficiency of Polish evaluation research. This problem is illustrated by another example. This is a prolix beginning of a certain summary:

A research project has been designed as a research in the scope of applied social science. This means that data and information collected and processed as a result of project implementation were and will be a starting point for the formulation of multidimensional diagnosis of functioning of Intermediate Body in the scope under examination and for the formulation of recommendations oriented at improvement and optimisation of its measures in the future.

Both the journalists and official decision-makers expect brief, condensed, yet transparent information about the research and recommendations. It should be also pointed out that the journalists themselves write about evaluation very well (in a communicative manner) – they can significantly simplify the language of reports that they use.

6. Main language mannerism of reports – prolixity of the writing style

Evaluation reports are written by experts and hence they reflect stylistic features of specialist (scientific) utterances.[51] This does not mean, however, that they can be successfully used to convey knowledge about evaluation to both target groups. These texts are difficult to perceive at the first reading, and they require repeated analysis of the information included therein. The main factor hindering the perception of reports by non-experts (e.g. journalists or decision-makers) is scientific formulation of the writing style (syntactic form and text organisation). Difficulty in perception is deepened by the knowledge about the world included in scientific reports, and thus financial and administrative EF issues found in documents submitted for expert's elaboration. **Therefore, the difficult report language results from the combination of the form of scientific text** (e.g. abstract reasoning, message based on evidence and circumstances, utterances reflecting analytical reasoning, valuation of phenomena in question, precise classification of data, etc.) **with the knowledge on EU and EF** (scientific and legal terminology, administrative terminology, patterns typical for official expressions, tendency to use precise administrative terms, etc.). Complex message style is not beneficial for conveying the knowledge and hence presenting the phenomena assessed by experts in the form of specific hints, instructions, advice and practical information. In these texts, two style mannerisms collide that limit the transparency of language and disturb the effectiveness of expression (adjustment thereof to communication competences and demand of recipients). Without dwelling on the details, they include: **the features of scientific style** (i.e. formal formulation of reports) and **paraphrase of formal administrative EU language** (terminology, linguistic template and expressions typical for texts about EF written by administrative employees). Communicative relations are illustrated by the following chart:
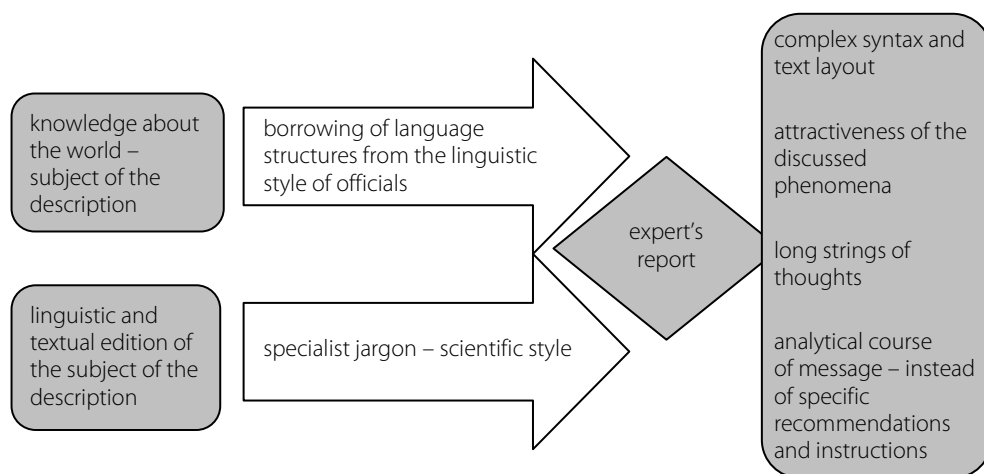

Fig. 10. Impact of scientific style and official jargon of the EU administration on the style of evaluation reports

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[51] See S. Gajda, *Podstawy badań stylistycznych nad językiem naukowym* [*Basis for stylistic study on scientific language*], PWN, Warsaw 1982; D. Buttler, H. Kurkowska, H. Satkiewicz, *Kultura języka polskiego. Zagadnienia poprawności leksykalnej* [*Polish Language Culture. Lexical correctness issues*], PWN, Warsaw 1982; H. Jadacka, *Poradnik językowy dla prawników* [*Linguistic guide for lawyers*], Semper, Warsaw 2006; A. Markowski (Ed.), *Wielki słownik poprawnej polszczyzny* PWN [*PWN Great dictionary of Polish*], PWN, Warsaw 2006; A. Markowski, *Kultura języka polskiego. Teoria. Zagadnienia leksykalne* [*Polish language culture. Theory. Lexical issues*], PWN, Warsaw 2005.

The language of evaluation reports contains a lot of difficult vocabulary, yet in terms of semantics it does not differ when compared to other scientific genres. The aspect that is most difficult in perception turns out to be the structure (form) of words and the method of combining them (in single word combinations and longer utterances). Should these combinations be unclear, such a feature is called **style nominalisation**. It consists in using lexical forms with preference of nouns over verbs in texts (as described previously). It is one of the features of these utterances in which the attitude of scientific writing about the world is reflected (intellectualisation of thinking about the world) and abstract expression. At the vocabulary level, they are usually expressed by:

- abstract nouns (e.g. *findings, evaluation, increase in something, articulation, specifics, field, transposition, issue, process, strategy, competitiveness, demarcation*, etc.);
- adjectives with quite general and unclear meaning (e.g. *specific, strong, individual, precise, development-oriented, innovative, operational, necessary, broad, exact, diagnostic*, etc.);
- deverbal and verbal nouns (e.g. *achieving, planning, adjusting, accepting, monitoring, reviewing, applying, functioning, endangering, entering*, etc.);
- participles (e.g. *manifested, achieved, balanced*, etc.);
- comparative expressions and extended adverbs (e.g. *of nature, in a manner, with a view to, at the level of, in the field of, due to, completely, of a type, of characters, in the scope, by way of*, etc.);
- scientific terminological and semantic neologisms (*allocation, diversification, extrapolation, extensive accumulation* and others).

The indicated lexical types make the sentences extremely extensive. In addition, they are characterised by abstract meaning and reduction in the role of personal verb forms (expressing specific actions, activities and measures). Therefore, the utterances become prolix (more difficult to perceive), and semantic fields included therein refer to data, facts, details and subtle properties of phenomena under discussion, decreasing the importance of specific hints, recommendations and advice.

Examples of the difference between the nominal (prolix) and the verbal style (recommended by linguists) are presented in the sentence below with changed structure:

Not readable sentence	Readable sentence
Only comprehensive approach to analysis gives a guarantee of clearly increased effectiveness.	*Only full analysis guarantees effectiveness* [*of something*]

The importance of scientific message in this case was not reduced, instead the point of view desirable for evaluation reports has changed: the recipient's perspective came to the foreground (information on the impact of analysis) instead of the author's perspective (abstract analysis description). A lot of abstract opinions can be simplified by changing dysfunctional linguistic structures, constituted mainly by **periphrastic expressions** (meaning complex strings of lexemes detailing or multiplying meanings of simpler expressions). They consist mainly of **analytical structures** (*approach to analysis = analysis, give guarantee = guarantee*) or **redundant structures – pleonasms and tautologies** (*clearly increased effectiveness = increased effectiveness*). These linguistic structures usually lead to long syntactic units and focus the attention of recipients on details weakening the importance of indications, recommendations, information about specific activities. There are quite a lot of them in evaluation reports.

Analytical structures are typical for official messages, including scientific and administrative style. They feature primarily complex (and hence prolix) wording structure and superiority of a component

that could be omitted without (major) modification in meaning (e.g. *the fact that (superordinate)… + impact (subordinate) = the impact// to influence*)[52]. Analytisms mainly introduce abstract reasoning to the text, and hence increase details of description, differences between subject of description and expose the categories of quoted terms (quantitative, qualitative, spatial, temporary, genre-related, etc.). In other words, recipients focus their attention not on "what and how it works// what is it", but on "what is what// what are its features".

Another linguistic means extending the structure of utterances is constituted by periphrastic combinations doubling the meaning of the words that have already been used in the text. This collection consists of redundant structures[53] containing **pleonasms** (expressions whose subordinate element repeats the meaning of the superordinate element, e.g. *completely (subordinate) + eradicate (superordinate) = eradicate*) and **tautologies** (coordinate combinations of semantically equivalent words, e.g. *scarce and concise*). Redundant structures are dysfunctional because of at least two reasons: they usually cause a lot of logical mistakes in the utterances, besides they do not contribute any new information to the text and only deepen the emotionality of message and valuation of description. Currently, they are used most frequently as wide-spread expressions common in colloquial style (e.g. *to descend down*) or in the journalist style (e.g. *urban agglomeration, water reservoir*).

The prolixity of evaluation reports is caused by **syntactic and textual elements**, in which the tendency of recipients to emphasise their own point of view, to extend the analysis is reflected, as well as tendency towards scientific narration and valuation of the description alone. Information and content of texts is unnecessarily obscured by numerous metatextual expressions, appositions and comments about the text. Notably when they contain secondary content weakening concrete opinions, e.g.:

Even in case of absence of experience in this respect, such a situation can be resolved in a very optimal manner in the expert's opinion through implementation of partner projects.

Too short time for development of competition documentation is counted from the moment of announcing the call for proposals until its closure.

Very often it is precisely the subjective feelings and moods that cause various responses of investors that are unexplainable and irrational in economic and measurable terms and under circumstances that can be subject to technical analysis.

The prolixity of linguistic structures, abstract style reducing the importance of specific information, cause-and-effect reasoning are at variance with the purpose of evaluation reports, which should include research conclusion in the form of concise and simple expressions. The causes of such stylistic irregularities are included in the table below.

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[52] See J. Anusiewicz, *Konstrukcje analityczne we współczesnym języku polskim* [*Analytical structures in the contemporary Polish*], Published by: UWr, Wrocław 1978.

[53] See A. Małocha-Krupa, *Słowa w lustrze. Pleonazm – semantyka – pragmatyka* [*Word in mirror. Pleonasm – semantics – pragmatics*], Published by: UWr, Wrocław 2003.
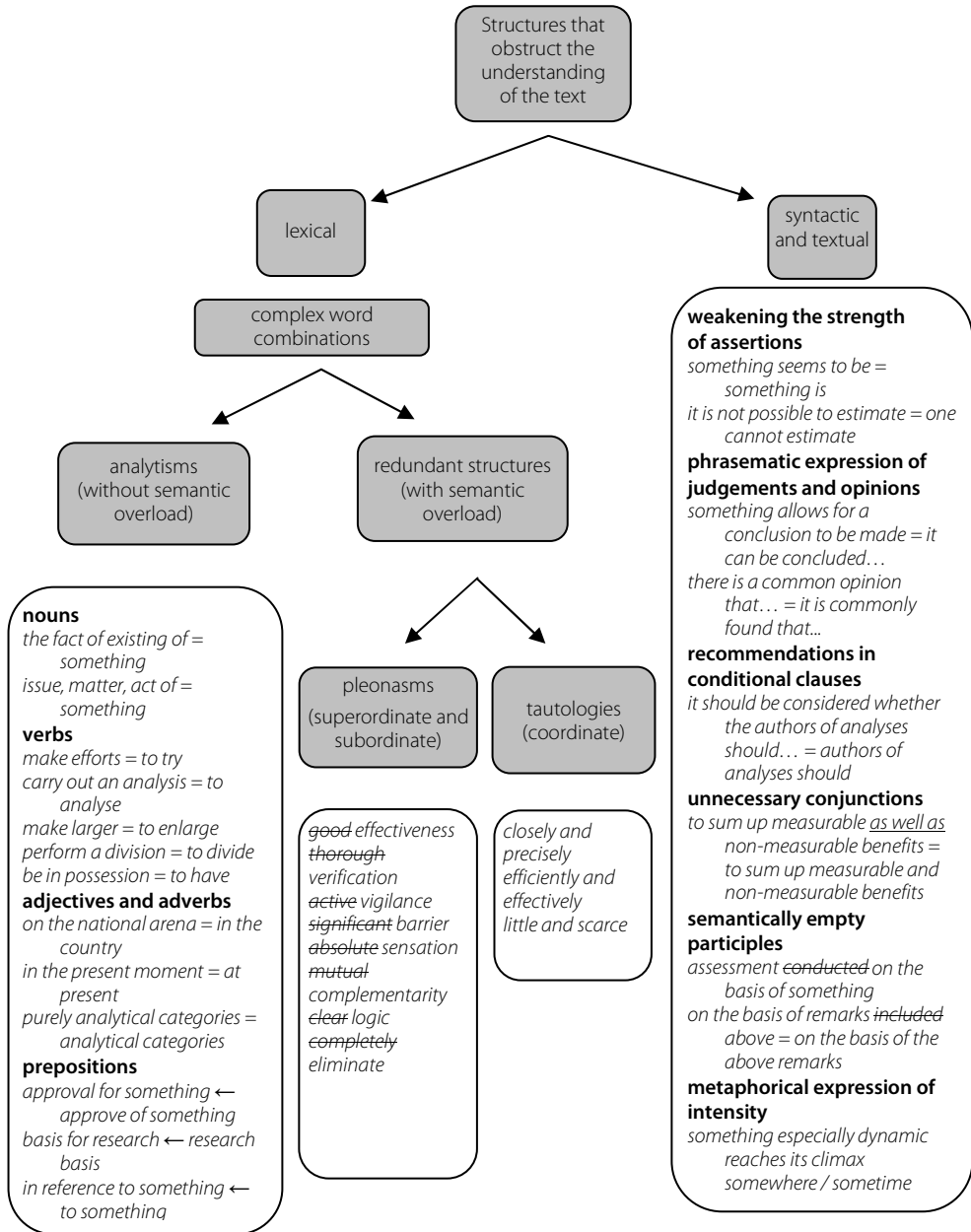
Fig. 11. Typology of structures that extend a sentence

Table 1. Reason for the emergence of prolix structures

Paralinguistic sources	• intellectualisation of utterance: structuring information into categories, typologising, comparing, valuation • presentation of abstract information: assessments, values, results, causes, description categories, etc. • search for dependency between collected information and comparison of data • focus on description details • distancing from the subject of the description • taking an expert's position (examination and assessment of the EF-related issues)		
Structure type	**Analytisms**	**Pleonasms and tautologies**	**Syntactic and textual structures**
Causes and functions	• multiplication of information about description details • prioritisation of data • creation of categories, sorts, types • creation of abstract relations between pieces of information • using conventional official EF terminology	• strengthening the description • gradation of information and assessments • detailing information	• building cause-and-effect sequences • introduction of judgements amplifying or weakening the value of an utterance • protective attitude in case of judgements and assessments requiring additional research • emphasising the course of presentation • introduction of additional comments about the text (and its individual parts, components, etc.) • impersonal message
Style	• scientific style • official style	• journalistic style • colloquial style	• scientific style • official style

7. How to write about evaluation reports?

On the basis of conducted analyses, a list of the most important recommendations for authors of evaluation research has been prepared. These rules apply both to style and the structure of evaluation report, and compliance with them will assure that decision-makers and journalists will quickly acquire the most important information on research, e.g. conclusions and recommendations.

Selection of the method to present research results to the employer

1. Results of evaluation research should be presented in three stages:[54]
    • oral report (with a multimedia presentation) and negotiation of recommendations,
    • report on research in writing,
    • summary in the form of a separate brochure.
2. The mentioned genres have different recipients and perform various functions:
    • Oral presentation (with a multimedia presentation) is intended for employer institutions commissioning the research. This form assures constructive debate about the conclusions and joint development of recommendations.
    • The report is intended for specialists, and it constitutes the documentation of the research process.

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[54] Obviously, there are many ways of informing about evaluation research and promoting the results thereof (e.g. newsletter, sponsored article, multimedia broadcast, etc.). At this point, we focus solely on the reporting process, meaning the texts prepared directly after research by the evaluators themselves.

- The summary brochure is intended for decision-makers and journalists, so that they can get acquainted with extensive research documentation.

3. Presentation of research results should be divided into three stages:
   - Interpretation of results (negotiated) – evaluators present the employers with an oral report on the research in the form of a multimedia presentation, and afterwards there is a discussion on the conclusions and recommendations;
   - Acceptance of the final report – the evaluators present a detailed report with research conclusions in writing;
   - Communication of evaluation results – decision-makers, journalists and public opinion obtain the most important information about evaluation results (in the form of summarising brochures, etc.).[55]

Structure of evaluation report

In terms of genre,[56] evaluation report is a separate type of scientific (research) report. However, the traditional structure should be modified. The scientists – in the ordinary reports – have to authenticate the research and concentrate on the chronology (and logic). The authors of evaluation reports have a different task. First of all, they have to effectively inform about research results and, at the same time, answer the questions WHAT RESULTS FROM THE EVALUATION?

Keeping the scientific structure of an evaluation report means restricting the group of potential recipients to the group of scientists. Such a report will not assure effective communication with decision-makers and journalists.

How to change a scientific report into an evaluation report?

These are effective modifications to a scientific report (optional):

- substituting the scientific summary with a correct executive summary,
- adding a chapter containing recommendations to the report,
- transferring the description of the methodology to annexes,
- transferring conclusions and recommendations to the beginning of the report,
- omitting the detailed description of research subject,
- adding an index of abbreviations and symbols,
- adding a description of specific cases, i.e. good practices.

Table 2. How to change a traditional scientific report into an evaluation report

SCIENTIFIC REPORT	EVALUATION REPORT
1. Summary	1. Executive summary
2. Introduction	2. Introduction (description of research)
3. Subject of research	3. Conclusions
4. Purpose of research	4. Recommendations
5. Methodology	5. Presentation of results
6. Research progress	6. Good practices
7. Analysis / results	7. Annexes
8. Conclusions	8. Description of methodology (methodological note)
9. Bibliography	
10. Annexes	

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[55] M.C. Alkin, *Evaluation Essentials. From A to Z*. Guilford Press, New York 2011.
[56] See A. Duszak, *Tekst, dyskurs, komunikacja międzykulturowa* [*Text, Discourse, Intercultural Communication*], PWN, Warsaw 1998; B. Witosz, *Genologia lingwistyczna. Zarys problematyki* [*Linguistic genology. Outline of issues*], Published by: UŚ, Katowice 2005.

The most important report elements are the chapters that clearly and precisely inform about the evaluation research. This group includes: executive summary, conclusions and recommendations.

Simplification of the language

Reports have to be written using scientific language in the analytical and methodological part. However, the strategic fragments, that is summaries, conclusions and recommendations, should be written in a readable language. In order to achieve such simplicity, it will be necessary to:

- use short sentences – up to 15 components in a single sentence and up to three clauses in a compound sentence,
- avoid breaking the sentences with digressions and subordinate clauses,
- use short words (consisting of 1, 2 or 3 syllables),
- use commonly understood words,
- avoid scientific terminology,
- avoid sequences of nouns (the so-called noun plague),
- avoid nouns denoting activities and features (activity = verb),
- avoid prolix and multi-word forms,
- use frequent listings and bulleting.

Marek Maziarz, PhD – quantitative, corpora and computer linguist, research employee of the Artificial Intelligence Faculty at the Wrocław University of Technology. His studies cover automatic processing of Polish language. He is the coordinator of a linguists' team working on relational digital dictionary of Polish. Maziarz studied theoretical physics and philosophy. He combines humanities with the capability of mathematical modelling of reality. He is co-author of a book devoted to analysis of the European Funds language. Maziarz is a member of the Simple Polish Laboratory – a research group tasked with the development of a plain language standard for Polish.

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Dominika Maison

Possibilities and conditions for use of focus studies in evaluation

What are focus studies?

Focus studies, officially called focus group interviews, are a type of qualitative studies, whose specificity lies in the fact that one person (the moderator) leads a discussion with several people simultaneously. This method is seemingly very simple and does not require special knowledge or preparation – just an ordinary conversation with several people. Unfortunately, these are just appearances, and the consequence of such a belief is the conduct of focus studies of poor quality, whose results either serve no purpose, or – even worse – may do harm if, for example, wrong decisions are taken on their basis. Focus research is a very useful method which can provide valuable information. For this to happen, however, several conditions must be met concerning the type of needed information, the planning of adequate testing regime, determination of appropriate criteria for selection of respondents, and above all, suitably qualified researchers.

Focus research has an established position in the field of marketing, where they help in making business decisions. In the case of most large companies, especially multinational ones, many important decisions, both strategic and tactical, are supported by research findings. Marketing research has become a standard in modern business, where it is impossible to maintain a high position in the market without resorting to knowledge on consumers – final recipients of products. Among the marketing research a very important place is occupied by focus research. They are irreplaceable in questions of an exploratory nature, which are aimed at in-depth understanding of the problem, for example, when the goal is to understand the marketing and advertising communication, testing concepts of product positioning and examining the needs and motives related to the use of (or barriers associated with not using) a product or brand.

The situation is somewhat different with the use of focus studies in social projects. Studies are often not carried it this field (either quantitative or qualitative). Sometimes this is due to financial reasons, sometimes because of lack of knowledge about the type of research to be performed, when, with whom, with what method and to what purpose. If, however, studies are carried out in the framework of social projects, they are more often quantitative than qualitative. This situation has many causes. Firstly, most people "understand" quantitative methods better than qualitative ones. This is understandable, since during the whole process of education we learn to count and draw conclusions from the figures, the media often present results of surveys, almost anyone can imagine what the percentage of something is. The situation as regards the understanding and drawing conclusions from qualitative data is worse. We are usually denied such training during the education process.

Ignorance of the qualitative research characteristics often results in perceiving them as "inferior" methods of research, where it is not possible to draw reliable conclusions. Qualitative methods are often accused of lower reliability and accuracy in relation to quantitative research and therefore, if someone uses them, it is often too cautiously and only complementary to quantitative methods. Such an approach is definitely wrong. Both methods are useful and helpful, but each of them must be used with full understanding of their specificity and awareness of their weaknesses.

The decision about the method – key decision in the research process

Is the problem of qualitative nature?

Before we proceed to discuss the principles of conducting good and useful focus research in evaluation studies, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the first and crucial step for the research process is the answer to the question **whether our problem is qualitative**. The correct answer to this question often determines the success of the entire research. Unfortunately, at this particular stage, one can make the mistake of choosing a method not adapted to the research problem. However, in order not to commit such an error and choose well between qualitative and quantitative methods, one must first understand the specifics of each of these methods of research, know differences between them, and be aware of their limitations.

The first and fundamental difference between quantitative and qualitative methods relates to different **issues and research questions,** that are the subject of studies using any of these methods (see Table 1). Quantitative studies are focused on quantitative description of reality, for example: how many unemployed are in Poland, whether there are more unemployed among younger people or older people, how often the unemployed visit employment offices, what are the demographic differences between those benefiting from EU subsidies and those who are not, which EU programs attract more attention and which are not popular. However, in the case of qualitative research, we are trying to understand the **variety of phenomena** rather than their incidence. An example of the problem, which would give grounds to conduct qualitative research would be a question about social and cultural determinants of unemployment. Researcher would try to understand the specificity of the unemployed and those which have a job, despite similar living conditions and demographic characteristics. From such observations he could draw conclusions about the qualitative differences between the groups and understand the qualitative reasons for both situations.

In summary, in the quantitative research, **research questions** are often conclusive (e.g. which is more popular, training of A or B). In qualitative research, questions are exploratory and explanatory, for example: "What makes training A more popular than training B?", "What types of information communicated during training provided cause that this knowledge is used by participants in practice?" or "Why does training C not attract the interest of potential beneficiaries?".

Table 1. Comparison of quantitative and qualitative methods

	Research method	
	Quantitative methods	**Qualitative methods**
Research questions	Conclusive questions, describing the problem quantitatively (questions: "how much", "who", "how often")	Exploratory questions, describing the problem qualitatively (questions: "what", "how", "why")
Measurement Tool	Survey – questions of fixed form and order, preponderance of closed questions	Interview scenario – free way of acquiring information (questions as the outline of the interview, open questions)
Sample	Random or quota	Purpose
	Large – usually within the limits of 500–1000 persons	Small – 20 to 50 people (often calculated by the number of interviews/groups, not individuals)
Analysis and interpretation of results	Analysis using the statistics – more objective	Analysis without the use of statistics – more free and subjective Many possibilities of interpretation (many conclusions), but also the risk of over-interpretation or misinterpretation – analysis is often more difficult than in quantitative research
	Possibility of a quantitative generalization of the results to the population	Lack of possibility of a quantitative generalization of the results to the population NOTE! possible qualitative generalization of the results to the population

Source: D. Maison, *Jakościowe metody badań marketingowych. Jak rozumieć konsumenta* [*Qualitative methods of marketing research. How to understand a consumer*], PWN, Warsaw 2010, p. 17.

Focus research for certain?

If the type of a research question indicates that we should carry out a qualitative research, we should consider whether what we need is a focus research, or perhaps another method of qualitative research will better respond to our research question. There is no doubt that for years the focus studies have been the most popular method of qualitative research. However, they are not a panacea for all research problems and can not be used without examining whether this is really the best method for a given situation. One has to remember that beside focus research there are many other methods that can be successfully used (see Table 2).

First, there are in-depth individual interviews, commonly referred to as individual interviews or IDIs. Group and individual in-depth interviews, despite some differences, often yield similar results, and may be used interchangeably. However, there are situations in which, instead of group interviews, it is better to carry out individual interviews, or vice versa. The decision about whether to conduct an individual interview or a group interview should result primarily from **substantive considerations – the purpose of research**. When the objective of a research is to understand complex mechanisms (e.g. barriers for refraining from taking actions), and we also suspect that some of these mechanisms may be unconscious, we should definitely choose individual interviews. Conversely, if the goal is the general orientation in the topic about which little is known or when we want an exchange of views between different people, group interviews may be more useful.

Decision whether to conduct group or individual interviews is in practice often determined also by **pragmatic** considerations. If the participants in the research are to be people who can quite easily be found and persuaded to participate in the research (individual participants of subsidized trainings), without any problem, we can conduct group interviews. Thanks to this, the research can be completed

relatively quickly. If, however, we are looking for people who are hard to reach (such as experts, presidents of multinational corporations, owners of large businesses), it is better to opt for individual interviews.

Such interviews can be more easily conducted, because the respondent does not have to adjust to the time and place of the interview, only the moderator has to adjust to the respondent.

Two other qualitative methods – mini-groups and dyads – are linked with changes that have taken place within the qualitative research in recent years. These changes result primarily from the need to better understand the researched phenomena and the knowledge of researchers that a man is not always aware of his attitudes, motives and needs. In order to understand these unconscious or difficult to express areas, one must go beyond – often superficial – declarations of the respondent expressed in the classic focus research consisting of many participants. The consequence of this is, firstly, a gradual reduction in the number of participants in focus research. 20 years ago in Poland, focus groups sometimes consisted of 10–12 respondents. Several years ago, group interviews with nine people were a standard. Currently, a typical group interviews are those with 6–7 participants. It is more important, than the reduction in the number of participants, to understand that the quality of data obtained in a focus research is often inversely proportional to the number of its participants. It turns out that the interviews conducted in a smaller group can, paradoxically, provide more in-depth information than focus research in larger groups. Therefore, the focus group research should not be viewed from the perspective of the respondents (which takes place in quantitative research), and more from the perspective of the number of conducted interviews in the context of the adopted scheme of research.

Sometimes, when a research problem is complicated and there are many research topics to be discussed during the meeting, studies with fewer participants are more useful and a possibility of **mini-groups** should be considered – that is, group interviews with 4–5 participants. Advantage of a mini-group is the possibility of examining the topic more thoroughly than in the case of conventional group interviews. This feature makes them closer to individual in-depth interviews, while maintaining the basic characteristics of group interviews – the possibility of interaction between participants. Interview in a small group gives all participants the opportunity to participate more actively. Similarly, with the possibility of creating a more intimate atmosphere than in the classic focus research, mini-groups are suitable for difficult topics or topic requiring communication of complex information by each participant.

Another interesting qualitative method are **dyads**, that are in some sense, a compromise between individual and group interview, taking from each what is good. Dyads are studies that involve two respondents at the same time, with a possibility of expressing their opinions in a lengthy and in-depth manner typical for individual interviews, and the possibility of confrontation and discussion – typical for group interviews. Carrying out dyads, in comparison with focus research, is supported by already mentioned substantive considerations- **a greater deepening of the topic**. Conducting dyads, in comparison with individual interviews, is supported by the possibility of confronting opinions of two respondents and a variety of pragmatic considerations. Firstly, in comparison with individual interviews, dyads are easier to conduct logistically: one has contact with a larger number of respondents at a given time. Secondly, dyads are easier to observe by the customer: they are less monotonous than individual interviews, more things happen, there is a greater diversity of expressions, opinions, viewpoints and experiences.

There are two types of dyads: homogeneous and confrontational. **Homogeneous dyads are those** involving people with similar experiences (e.g. specialists in the same field, users of the same brand of product) or views (e.g. political or social). While **confrontational dyads** are interviews involving people with different views or experiences, and the purpose of such research is to capture the differences between these types of respondents and confront their opinions (for example, proponents and opponents of

the European Union). When we want to confront the respondents, confrontational dyads are definitely preferable to mixing respondents with different views in one focus group. In a group, diverse views are usually averaged which is a natural consequence of group processes.

Table 2. Various methods of qualitative research – their specificity and rationale for selection

Method	Specificity	Rationale for selection
Focuses – focus group interviews	6–7 participants, duration – ca. 2 hours	• looking for general information, such as study of habits • topics related to learning about simple opinions (e.g. opinion about the functioning of public transport) • topics that require discussion and interaction • short time to carry out the entire research
Mini-groups	fewer participants in the group (4–5 people)	• looking for a more in-depth information • difficult respondents (e.g. specialists) • children
Extended groups	longer duration (3–4 hours)	• lots of issues to be discussed • need for a thorough, in-depth discussion of many topics
Individual in-depth interviews	interview with one respondent	• need to greatly deepen the information • need to reach the unconscious areas (e.g. needs, motives, values, barriers) • territorially dispersed respondents • hard to reach respondents • specialists, experts – people who can provide much information
Dyads	simultaneous interview with two respondents	• Similar premises as the case of individual in-depth interviews • additional opportunities for discussion, confrontation of opinions • faster implementation of research (as compared with individual interviews) • greater number of respondents at the time of the research

Specialists in qualitative research around the world come to the conclusion that it is less important, what the group says, and more important what a single person says. That is why instead of searching for consistent opinions in a focus group, researchers look for a repetition of opinions in future interviews (both individual and group). A more reliable basis for generalizing the conclusions is the situation where similar views are repeated in subsequent interviews, rather than a situation where 6–7 people present the same views in one interview. We know, after all, that focus studies are burdened with the phenomenon of group conformism and one cannot avoid the mutual influence of various participants at each other.

Yet another type of qualitative research, and actually another variety of focus studies, are the so called **extended interviews** or **extended groups.** Another distinct change is the **lengthening of the duration** of focus interviews. These are group interviews (standard or mini) lasting 2.5–3 hours. However, if we have many issues to discuss and we want not only the description of the situation, but we want also to get in-depth information and understanding of the causes of the observed phenomena, it is strongly advisable to conduct extended interviews.

Persons who had no experience with extended focus studies often fear, that such an interview might be too long and therefore too strenuous for respondents. This is not always the case – a lot depends on how the interview is conducted. If a meeting is not reduced simply to participants answering subsequent questions, but it also involves a wide variety of tasks (e.g., projection and supporting techniques), such a focus research, even if it takes 3 hours, can be very interesting for the participants.

In the context of considerations of methods of qualitative research other than focus research, it is worth to mention the recently fast-growing worldwide trend of qualitative research on the Internet. Researchers showed interest in the qualitative research on the Internet already in the 1980s, when computers have become popular. At that time researchers primarily focused on the attempt to accurately reconstruct the philosophy of focus research on the Internet. These were, firstly, studies in real time – several respondents participated simultaneously in a session conducted by a moderator. Moderator has been in contact with the respondents via Internet, and not only the interaction between the moderator and each of the participants was possible but also between all participants. Participants in the course of such a virtual meeting, discussed and performed different group tasks.

Although the focus studies via Internet seemed to be a very promising method, they were not actually adopted and continue to represent a minimal part not only of qualitative research, but also of qualitative research over the Internet. Currently, studies called bulletin boards are much more popular in the world. In this method, a group of panellists is selected for a research (from a dozen or so to several dozen people), who perform tasks for a specified time (e.g. two weeks). The role of a moderator is to provide respondents with specified tasks and assistance in their implementation, if necessary. What distinguishes this method from the previously described focus studies via the Internet, is the duration of the tasks – the participants carry out tasks at any convenient time. For example, in the morning the moderator provides respondents with a task or a question for another day, and respondents have the time to complete this task by the end of the day. A moderator can check several times a day the status of tasks implementation, give feedback to respondents, ask questions and provide explanations.

Sometimes, in the context of qualitative research via the Internet, next to the name *bulletin board* one can also come across the name of MROC – market research online communities. The difference between the two methods is not very clear, however, it is assumed that MROC last much longer (up to several months) and usually involve more respondents than the bulletin board. The issue of qualitative research on the Internet appears to be open, and much depends on the intentions of the researcher. The fact of the internet becoming more common and the freedom of its use, suggest that this particular trend in qualitative research will grow rapidly in the coming years[57].

Finishing considerations of the focus research in the context of other qualitative methods, it is worth to mention two important issues. First – that the **FGI, like any research technique, is associated both with a number of advantages and limitations,** that should be taken into account when planning a research (see Table 2a).

Second – that **when planning qualitative research one does not always have to select just one type of research**. In the case of some of the more complex research problems, combination of these methods is used in one research project. In the case of research, where the sources of information are both ordinary (and easily available) people and experts, one can, for example, conduct a research consisting of four focus studies with ordinary people and six individual interviews with experts. In other case, when we want both to know the general opinions of the respondents, see them and listen to their opinions, and at the same time we would like them to perform many tasks and we want to know opinions on each of these tasks, we can conduct, for example, several focus interviews and a research via the Internet.

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[57]   T.W. Miller, J. Walkowski, *Qualitative research online*, Research Publisher LLC.

Table 2a. Advantages and limitations of focus group interviews (FGI)

Advantages of FGI	Limitations of FGI
group dynamics – positive mutual influence of participants at each other – including encouraging others to participate in the discussion	possibility of mutual negative impact of participants at each other – including group conformism, suggesting, dominance
positive impact of a moderator – effective stimulation of discussion – obtaining objective information	negative impact of a moderator hindering the discussion (e.g. by inappropriate verbal and nonverbal signal) obtaining subjective information (e.g. consent with the researcher's hypotheses or expectations of the person who commissioned the research)
information from more people at a given time	information that is more superficial than in the individual interview

Source: D. Maison, *Jakościowe metody badań marketingowych. Jak rozumieć konsumenta* [*Qualitative methods of marketing research. How to understand a consumer*], p. 67, PWN, Warsaw 2010.

Research sample – who will be our respondents?

Sampling and selection criteria

After the first major decision in the research process, pertaining to the selection of the method, another crucial step for the success is the decision regarding who will be our respondents, that is, **how to select the sample** for research. And also in this case, it is easier for many people to intuitively understand the sample in a quantitative research rather than in the qualitative research. For quantitative research, especially if the aim is to diagnose the situation in the population, people are chosen in such a way as to constitute the best reflection of the researched population – so that the groups are representative.[58] Selection can be either random or quota. A prerequisite for random selection is having the basis for all population objects, (so called sampling frame) from which the sample is drawn for research. That sampling frame for all Poles can be the database of the Universal Electronic System for Registration of the Population. A prerequisite for the quota selection is having the information about the structure of the population in terms of selected variables and building a research sample so it reflects population structure in terms of these variables. In the case nationwide research, where we want to generalise the results to all Poles, such criteria are usually basic demographic characteristics. In the case of research of companies, such criteria may be the size of companies in terms of the number of employees or turnover.

Selection of people for qualitative research is completely different. In the qualitative study, the selection of people is always a **purposeful selection**. Purposeful selection is based on the specific characteristics of the subjects (or other research objects), necessary for understanding the problem and specific for a population which is the object of research. It should be noted that in the qualitative study, we do not need to talk with all types of subjects belonging to the population (this would give a very superficial view of the situation), instead we are trying to get in-depth understanding of the section of the population which is the most crucial for the problem. Therefore, we do not need to talk with people of all ages, in all cities, or having all kinds of experiences. The success of such a research depends on whether we selected the **relevant section of the population** – one which we are most interested in and which can provide the most desired information. In the qualitative study – despite what it sometimes wrongly appears – the selection of a sample is equally as important as in quantitative research. If you talk

[58] G.A. Churchill, *Marketing Research: Methodological Foundations*, PWN, Warsaw 2002.

to anyone, instead of those with whom we should talk, we could not obtain the information sought, or – even worse – get the picture wrong, leading to wrong decisions.

Table 3. Types of selection criteria and their specificity

Criterion	Specificity	Example
Common selection criteria	Meeting these criteria is a prerequisite for participation in the research and they are common to all research participants.	Being a business owner Being a beneficiary of EU funds
Differentiating selection criteria	Criteria for determining the scheme of research and the number of interviews – they decide the diversity of interviews.	Being a small business owner vs. being a medium-sized business owner Being a beneficiary of funds from programme A vs. programme B
Essential criteria of purposeful selection	Specific criteria for a given research arising from the research objectives (directly affecting the quality of the information sought). Failure to meet these criteria undermines the usefulness of the person's participation in the research.	These can be both common criteria and differentiating criteria, for example, not being a beneficiary of a programme, when the subject of interview is assessment of various dimensions of participation in the programme
Additional criteria related to the **objective** of the research	Additional criteria are defined later (after the essential criteria.) These criteria are not as strict as those considered essential and can often omitted. They are introduced, however, to understand additional aspects of the problem. If we want to understand the diversity of opinions in terms of these variables, they affect the scheme of research (number of scheme groups). If they have only the meaning of control – they do not affect the scheme. Their control is to ensure the homogeneity of groups or the entire research.	These criteria generally include demographic variables: gender, age, income, education, position. They influence the research scheme. When planning the interviews, we separately organize a group of respondents, e.g. elderly and young people / beneficiaries and rejected applicants, so as to ensure homogeneity of the groups.
Additional criteria related to the **methodology** of the research	The usual criteria used in most qualitative research in order to: minimize abuse during recruitment related to exclusion of respondents that do not comply with the assumed recruitment parameters, e.g. respondent in the invited group of beneficiaries, who was the beneficiary of another programme	These criteria serve to minimize abuse during recruitment, for example: No participation in the qualitative research in recent times – exclusion of "professional respondents". Participants do not know each other.

Cf. source D. Maison, *Jakościowe metody badań marketingowych. Jak rozumieć konsumenta* [*Qualitative methods of marketing research. How to understand a consumer*], p. 105, PWN, Warsaw 2010.

Imagine that we are interested in the reasons for low interest in EU grants for small and medium enterprises, which manifests itself in a small number of applications for such grants. In order to correctly conduct such a research, we also must **determine very well the characteristics of our respondents**, so that we could get from them as much information as we want. In this case, the selection has **two stages**, firstly, it should take into account the **characteristics of companies** (e.g. in terms of size, line of business, age, sector, or such features as "benefited" or "not benefited" from the EU subsidies), and secondly, **the characteristics of persons in companies**, with whom we will conduct a final interview

(the owner/president/ managing director/person managing the project, which received a subsidy, person who formally prepared/settled the application/grant, ordinary employees, etc.).

Purposeful selection – as the name suggests – is subject to the purpose of the research. Since the purpose of qualitative research is to study and understand the problem through its deepening, participants should be selected so that one can learn from them as much as possible and get the most valuable data. In this case the wrong selection means acquiring information which do not meet the objectives of the research. One of the major mistakes in formulating the criteria for selection of respondents for qualitative research is too much focus on demographic variables (gender, age, income, education), and omission of essential criteria, resulting directly from the research problem, for example, being a person interested in the EU grants or being the director of HR department in the company (see Table 3).

The more precise and corresponding to research objectives are the criteria for selection, the greater chance that research will lead to obtaining the information needed. Unfortunately, in case of many studies, determination of appropriate purposeful criteria is very difficult and sometimes only after the research, it turns out that selection criteria have been formulated incorrectly.[59]

Sample size – less, but more accurately

In the context of qualitative research, the question that arises from people with little experience with such methods, is how **many participants there has to be** (i.e. what should be the size of a sample) for such research to be good and reliable. This question comes directly from thinking about the samples in quantitative research, while in qualitative research – to be executed correctly – this way of thinking must change.

Samples in quantitative studies are usually large, depending on the research problem and selection methods: from several hundred to several thousand people. The large sample in quantitative research is needed to minimize the measurement error and to analyze the results in various subgroups (e.g. people of different ages or with different levels of income). In the case of qualitative research samples are much smaller, mostly 20 to 50 people (a dozen or more individual interviews or several focus groups). Larger samples in qualitative studies are not recommended, because with more interviews, the analysis loses its quality and depth. Too much data of a qualitative nature is impossible to grasp by the researcher, and therefore not used in the analysis.

Research scheme

Number of interviews – not too little, not too much

In the case of qualitative research, in principle, one should not be thinking about the research from the perspective of the number of respondents, but from the perspective of the number of interviews. Especially in the case of group interviews it is more important, **how many focus groups** were conducted, rather than exactly how many respondents participated. This, however, involves another difficult question – how many interviews should comprise a good focus research. Unfortunately, this question can not be clearly answered, everything depends on the purpose of the research and specific research questions, and above on the discriminatory selection criteria which determine the scheme of the research (see Table 3).

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[59] More about the selection criteria and principles of constructing the research scheme, [in:] D. Maison; *Jakościowe metody badań marketingowych. Jak zrozumieć konsumenta* [*Qualitative methods of marketing research. How to understand a consumer*], PWN, Warsaw 2010.

Although there is no clear rule for deciding the number of qualitative interviews, there are a few rules that determine the development of the scheme in qualitative research and the number of interviews. The first of these principles is the **principle of repeatability of observation**, which means that if we are to draw reliable conclusions from a qualitative research, we should strive to achieve the possibility of observing a repetition of results in at least a few interviews. Furthermore, it is also important to exclude the hypothesis that the results are a matter of chance (because, for example, the interview was poorly conducted, poorly selected respondents, or other uncontrollable circumstances occurred). From this follows the first rule **– research scheme can never be based on one or two interviews** (irrelevant if these are individual or group interviews). Usually it is assumed that the smallest qualitative research should consist of at least 6–8 individual interviews or 4–6 group interviews. Of course, one can imagine an extraordinary situation, for example, if we have access only to four experts. Then, however, it is much better to conduct with them four individual interviews than one group interview.

The factor in favour of increasing the number of interviews in the scheme may be searching for differences between researched groups (directly related to the differentiating selection criteria). If, e.g. in the focus research, we are interested in knowing how the usefulness of the training offer is evaluated by small, medium and large companies, we should conduct six focus groups – with two interviews in each segment that interests us. If we are interested in issues related to implementation of web applications in companies operating in various lines of business, the scheme of research should take into account the number of groups, which is twice the number of the lines of business that interest us. But then there is a **problem of excessive expansion in the research scheme**. If we have too many interviews, for example, 18–20 focus studies or 30 individual interviews, there is another problem – the ability to comprehend these results by the researcher and their proper interpretation. When the research scheme is too extensive, much information is simply lost, because the excess is not properly used in the analysis.

One can, however, imagine studies in which it is desirable to conduct a greater number of interviews. This happens when the scheme of research is very extensive due to the complexity and diversity of researched groups. An example of a very extensive research scheme is a research carried out in the U.S. prior to the creation of a social campaign aimed at preventing drug use among American youth. The aim of the qualitative part was not only to understand the motives of drug use, but also the specific values of groups to which the campaign was to be addressed. The research scheme had to be very extensive, because, firstly, young people are a very diverse category: a ten year old is a completely different person than a twelve year old or fifteen year old. Secondly, it was assumed that young people coming from different backgrounds, both social and ethnic, will be characterized by different themes and values. Thirdly, motives for reaching for marijuana and cocaine are much different, so groups had to be differentiated in terms of the experience with different types of drugs. As a result, the research consisted of several dozen focus groups. However, such studies are the exception, as a rule, the sample sizes in qualitative studies are small and the number of focus interviews rarely exceeds 10.

Determination of the appropriate number of groups and their correct composition is the most difficult when the research problem is little known. Then, one first need to think about what characteristics may be associated with a given problem and which of these characteristics may affect the differences in the functioning in a given area. When the research problem is very complicated, there can be many differing characteristics. Therefore, the next step is to consider whether each category of subjects is interesting enough to carry a separate interview with it. When planning a qualitative research, one must remember that this is not a quantitative research on a representative sample and its purpose is not to conduct interviews with all types of people belonging to the researched population. **The aim of the qualitative research is to select for interviews only those groups that are the most interesting to us from the point of view of the purpose of research and which also may provide us with much needed information.**

Research tools – scenario of interview and supporting techniques

Principles for developing a scenario

In quantitative studies, the essential **measurement tool** is the questionnaire (survey) consisting mainly of closed questions in which subjects indicate a response from a previously developed set (e.g. *"How long are you unemployed?" "Are you registered with the employment office?" "Do you use the Internet?"*). Questions are asked to every person in the same form and order. This allows for comparison of the individual results and it is assumed that the resulting differences are a reflection of differences between individuals, and not the result of differences in measurement.

In qualitative research, the measurement is much more casual, open questions dominate, giving greater freedom of expression to a person (e.g. *"Describe your daily life since you lost your job?" "Describe how you use the Internet? What is your typical day with the Internet? "*). In the qualitative interview, the researcher has only a **set of issues** that are the basis for discussion, and not a developed set of questions. The interview is conducted in a flexible way, adapting the form and order of questions for the purpose of research. People who are just beginning to be exposed to qualitative studies, often find it very strange and sometimes think that not asking a question by a researcher or changing its form is a mistake. However, it is the opposite – a good qualitative researcher is one who is able to **flexibly** adjust the course of the interview to the purposes of research and information sought. Therefore, if appropriate, during an interview he can change the elements of the scenario, rather than cling to a plan that leads nowhere.

The researcher, prior to the interview, prepares a **scenario**, which **should be consistent with the logical order of occurrence of various problems** (for example, when talking about issues related to the management of a programme, first we ask about issues related to the design, planning, followed by issues related to the implementation process, and at the end about the effects of the programme, its impact, etc.). Following this principle provides a natural transition between questions. When the scenario is well constructed, it sometimes happens, that a moment before asking another question (actually just before going to the next issue), this issue arises spontaneously in the discussion.

The scenario should not include too many questions, so that the moderator would not focus on finding the questions he has not yet asked, because then he would not listen to the participants. If the scenario is in the form of clearly written issues to be discussed, one look at a piece of paper (without a thorough reading) is sufficient for a moderator to remember what he has not yet discussed. There is no need to literally write the questions in the scenario, and indeed it is not recommended, because it distracts the moderator, and focuses his attention on the scenario rather than on the discussion. If the moderator knows what he wants to ask, he will formulate a question that should be asked accordingly (actually, it will just come to his mind). Since a good qualitative interview takes the form of a casual conversations, questions should be asked in everyday language. The literal reading of the questions from the paper makes the conversation unnatural.

Another important point is how many issues can be discussed in the course of one qualitative interview, and thus, how many issues can appear in a scenario. Firstly, one has to **make sure that the script is not overloaded**. If the scenario involves too many issues, the effect of this is that we will learn little from such a research, as most information will be too little deepened, and thus too trivial. It is assumed that a typical focus research can deal with **3–4 topic areas**. **Issues critical for the purpose of the research** should be placed **closer to the beginning** of the interview, while less important question, closer to the end. The remaining time should be dedicated to the introduction (important for building relations with respondents), warm-up and completion. However, if there is a need to discuss more issues, one should decide on extended groups rather than casually discuss everything in one interview.

Table 3a. Components of qualitative interview, their function and exemplary areas of conversation

Part of interview	Function	Exemplary area of conversation
Introduction	Clarification of the rules	• Presentation of the moderator • Information about the subject of the meeting • Information about the recording • Additional information, such as the availability of food and drinks • Presentation of the respondents
Warm-up	Establishing contact with respondents, respondents getting accustomed to the situation	• Simple, low-threatening issue about which the respondents can express easily • Rather the question about facts and experiences (easier) than the views (more difficult) • Sometimes, more elaborate presentation of the respondents can be seen as a warm-up • Depending on the needs, this part of the research may be very short

Essential questions	Deepening the most important research areas that are crucial for the project, and marketing questions	• Here can appear:
		  – key issues
		  – questions and tasks more difficult, requiring more effort on the part of respondent
		  – projection techniques

Supplementary questions	Possibility of asking for less important issues for the research project	• Questions of lesser importance for the research, additional questions, which in the absence of time can be discussed more casually.
Finishing the interview	Creating a natural end	• Informing by the moderator that this is the end • Asking whether respondents would like to add something

Supporting techniques

In the context of planning a scenario for a qualitative interview, one has to remember that the interview can be diversified with various supporting techniques. The first type of techniques are different types of tasks that are to be performed by respondents **in the focus research**. Thanks to them the interview is not a monotonous discussion for the respondents, it is more engaging, because more things happen. Secondly, some tasks (especially those done individually) allow for expression of individual opinions before the discussion, thereby minimizing the mutual influence of participants on each other. Thirdly, we ask sometimes about things that the respondent may not be aware of or may not be able to express them. Then, with skilfully matched techniques one can learn more and deeper.

The second type of techniques relates to the extension of collection of information from the respondent **beyond the duration of the interview**. Different types of **homework** (diaries) serve this purpose, where the respondent writes various types of impressions, experiences, observations corresponding to tasks communicated to him by a moderator. Such tasks are performed before the interview (sometimes even over 1–2 weeks) and then are collected by a moderator for further analysis, some of them are discussed during the interview.

Conducting the interview – the role of the moderator and the principal

Not everyone can be a moderator

Conducting qualitative interviews often looks from outside like a simple conversation, effortless, can be conducted by almost everyone without any special preparation, knowledge or skills. Perhaps almost everyone could conduct a conversation on a given topic, but there is a high risk that he would not found out he should and would not receive answers to research questions. For two hours of talk to bring the desired results, to provide the information sought, to give honest answers to all questions, a moderator must have both theoretical knowledge on the methodology of qualitative research, and – perhaps above all – practice. It should be noted that the quality of research in a very large extent depends on the skills of the interviewer.

A good focus moderator must possess a number of features related to both research insight and ability to work with the group. Moderator should first be **effective** from the viewpoint of the purpose of research – to lead the interview so he gets all the information sought from the participants, to understand their point of view and be able to give an answer to research questions on the basis of obtained results. In addition, a moderator must be a thorough person – he should not accept superficial statements of participants, but **inquire and deepen** the interview by reaching into the causes and motives of behaviour. He must try at all times during the course of the interview to understand the respondent by asking for examples and concrete experiences, and not remaining in conversation at the level of declarations and opinions. It is also important that the moderator is focused all the time on what respondents do and say. So he is able to listen with genuine interest (and also express it on verbal and nonverbal level – through verbal communication, posture, facial expressions, gestures), and on the other hand, so he is able to distinguish between "talking about anything" from "answers" and not be afraid to interrupt responses deviating from the topic.

The **flexibility** in conducting the interview is also very important. This ability allows the moderator, as needed, to make changes in the course of the interview. He is able to change the way of asking questions, their order, to invent and introduce new techniques during the interview, that will help in obtaining the information sought. That does not mean that the moderator should arbitrarily make changes in the course of the research and forget about the expectations of the customer. If a moderator senses that the scenario developed before the research or tasks for the respondents do not lead to obtaining of the information sought, he should be able to constantly make modifications and improvements.

Another skill which defines a good moderator is **asking the right questions**. Questions should be above all simple in terms of both length (short and without unnecessary words), and the vocabulary used (asked in simple language, without specialized words and jargon). Apart from the interviews with experts, one should avoid questions asked in professional language and too complex questions. Confusing questions, with a long introduction are asked mostly by novice moderators, who can expand the introduction to questions so that participants are confused and do not understand what exactly the moderator asks. An experienced moderator asks simple questions, using colloquial language, so the interview – even though this is not the case – gives the impression of a social chat, and not a "serious research".

In addition to these universal features of focus moderator should have some skills relating to working with a group. **Group processes,** which are a huge advantage of focus group interviews, can unfortunately also be a source of problems. Group processes unwanted in the course of focus interviews **cannot be avoided** (such as group conformity), but one can try to **understand and control** them.

A moderator, who knows the rules that govern the group processes, can conduct the interview so as to minimize their adverse impact on the results obtained. A moderator must also be able **to control the dominant respondents and stimulate withdrawn respondents,** so that the participation of the majority of interview participants is as far as possible uniform.

A moderator should also be sensitive to **nonverbal signals**, indicating that there are people in a group who do not fully agree with other people. Such a signal may be frowning or leaning back from a table during speeches of others. If a moderator sees it, he should always ask that person. Sometimes the research topic is so difficult and sensitive to social approval, that from the beginning there is a risk that participants will not reveal their real opinions. Then it is worth to introduce individual supporting techniques, in order to detect independent opinions of each respondent before the discussion and the possible interaction effects of the participants on each other.

The role of the principal

A major advantage of qualitative research as compared to quantitative research, is the **possibility to see and listen to the respondents**. Most of the focus studies is conducted in so called focus rooms, which are fitted with Venetian mirrors so one can easily observe the interview. This observation is usually very valuable for the principal because it gives him the opportunity to "sense" the problem, and not just analyze it on the basis of the report. Therefore, it is always worth to invite key recipients of a research to come to see at least one focus interview.

However, the presence of the client during the interviews entails a problem. It happens that the customer ordering the research **becomes too attached to individual respondents' answers.** One should keep in mind that what we see through the glass is "raw data" and usually also only a portion of all data. The overall picture of analytical results may be quite different than the impression on the basis of an individual interview. The advantage of an opportunity to observe the research is undoubtedly a "sense" of research and respondents, but in no event it may replace an in-depth analysis of the results performed by an experienced researcher.

Analysis of results

Analysis and interpretation of results

The next step of qualitative research is to analyze the results. Again, we have to refer to quantitative research in order to explain the specificity of qualitative analysis. In quantitative studies figure indices (percent, average) are analysed and statistical analyses are used, so they are more objective than qualitative studies. Qualitative analyses are characterized by a greater subjectivity, there is often more than one interpretation of the results, there are many possibilities and many more or less probable hypotheses for the interpretation. The subjectivity of the analysis is often seen as a weakness of qualitative research. In fact – provided that the research is conducted by experienced researchers – it creates the possibility of making a very thorough analysis and noticing relationships and phenomena that were not explicitly expressed, but which are important for the research problem.

A very important difference between quantitative and qualitative methods refers to the **generalization of the results** obtained in studies. Qualitative studies are sometimes regarded as an "inferior" method. It is alleged that they lack the possibility of translating observations from a research on the general conclusions relating to the population. This is true in a quantitative sense – one cannot make

conclusions on intensity and frequency of the observed phenomena in the population on the basis of a qualitative research. Therefore, if six of ten respondents had a negative experience with the training, and 4 had positive experience, we must not conclude that 60% of trainees (in Poland) have a negative experience with training. However, we can undoubtedly generalize conclusions regarding the causes of the observed phenomena and relationships, especially when we observe their repetition in subsequent interviews. We can draw generalized conclusions from the qualitative research, for example, about the causes of satisfaction and reasons for dissatisfaction with the training. It should be emphasized that the knowledge derived from qualitative research need not, and indeed should not, be limited to only a few or a dozen observations from the research.

Workshop – maximizing the use of qualitative research results

The solution, which more often arises in the context of research, both qualitative and quantitative, in addition to the traditional presentation of research results and a report, is ending a project with a **joint workshop of the research agency and the client**. During this workshop are presented results of research and the research agency and the client work together over the recommendations and directions for further actions. I personally urge for such **interactive** uses of qualitative research. This gives a **better understanding of research results**, and **the possibility of joint development of courses of action**, which are generally more accurate than those proposed by the researcher only on the basis of research results. The researcher often does not know all the realities of the research problem, he knows it only from the perspective of his respondents – but the principal has a much broader perspective that allows to embed the recommendations in the realities available for given solutions. On the other hand, the key recipients of results have a chance, through a workshop, to better understand both the information from the research process, and the context of jointly developed recommendations. Therefore, work during joint workshop on lines of action is usually more fruitful than the work of only one party.

Summary

Focus research is undoubtedly a very useful method for marketing, social and evaluation research. However, we must always remember that it is not – despite appearances – a simple method. in order to bring the desired results, it requires the involvement of experienced professionals. It is a mistake to treat this method as "inferior to quantitative research" and use it when one lacks the time or money on quantitative research or treat it only as a supplement to the data obtained with "better", i.e. quantitative methods. This approach results in seeking information with qualitative methods, which cannot be done with this method, and consequently making the wrong decisions based on the results of such research.

The consequence of the complexity of qualitative research is also the fact that this method is not inexpensive. A good **focus research will cost**. The price of research includes, firstly, various types of organizational costs: the cost of recruitment, remuneration for the respondents, renting a focus room and service. Another big expense is labour cost of skilled researchers, which consists planning the research, preparing interview scenario, moderation and the biggest work – the analysis and interpretation of results. Typically, the qualitative research project is not run by one researcher but by a team of researchers. Savings in any of these areas of research could lead to a significant reduction of the quality of research.

When launching the implementation of qualitative research projects, one should also be aware of **ethical principles**. Firstly, respondents should be respected, so regardless of their answers, they should

not be discredited, for example by insulting comments behind the mirror. Secondly, respondents should be anonymous. Regulations of research organizations (Esomar, QRCA, ACR) clearly emphasize that the survey data can be analyzed and passed on only at the global level. It is forbidden, for example, to present recordings of the interviews or talk about the findings to people unrelated to the research in a way which allows for identification of the respondents. The research company also cannot pass on (even to the principal) personal data of respondents.

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Paweł Wójcik

Projective techniques in evaluation research

Introduction

In 1980s and 1990s, a view prevailed that human is a rational being aware of its choices, and when taking decisions, it is guides above all by the so-called principle of maximal usefulness, which means that human is constantly calculating "what pays more".

However, more and more proofs questioning the rationality of human's decisions have started to emerge. They originated not only in the area of social or marketing research, but primarily in financial markets. Following the notorious "dot-com bubble" in 2000, the culmination of the "rationality crisis" occurred in 2008, and it ended in a crash on financial markets and collapse of economies of numerous countries. Of course, it does not mean that the model of rational human being is completely wrong and it should not be used in social research. At most it is an incomplete model that takes into consideration the role of emotions in human's decisions and irrational behaviour to a very low degree. It should be added here that irrational behaviour very often originates in unconsciousness, which leads straight to the heritage of psychoanalysis and what is known about unaware processes on the basis of research conducted by cognitive psychologists and neuropsychologists.

In the field of unaware processes, projection techniques occupy an exceptionally important position. They were developed on the basis of psychoanalysis, which devotes a great deal of attention to defence mechanisms of personality, meaning the method of dealing with difficult situations when our self-view is at risk. The case when the picture of ourselves is at risk means situations when we want other individuals to perceive us in a specific way (for instance that we are social activists), and we reject all the arguments that could contradict such a view of ourselves.

One of the more popular defence mechanisms is projection, which consists in attributing motives of behaviour that in fact are our motives to other persons, but we do not want to admit them or we are not aware of them. In the field of social research, this defence mechanism could be demonstrated by a situation when a person asked why they do not participate in actions organised by local communities, for instance a playground for children, pleaded lack of time. And the answer to the question why other do not participate in such actions was that it was caused by laziness or intention of transferring responsibility to others. In this specific example, it can be safely assumed that the examined persons are ashamed to admit they are lazy, which is the main reason of refusal to take part in the action for construction of a playground, but through the use of projection mechanism, we have an opportunity of learning the source of their genuine motivation.

The projection mechanism has become an inspiration to create a wide range of projection techniques used mainly in psychological research, however, due to obvious reasons, it has been very quickly annexed in social and marketing research.

Definition of projection

The term "projection" in the context of psychology has been used for the first time in psychoanalysis, where it meant one of the defence mechanisms of "ego" (self-view), consisting in attributing to others one's own negative feelings, features or motives of behaviour that were repressed to unconsciousness since they caused fear, or they could not be accepted by an individual because of other reasons. According to the assumptions of psychoanalysis, this content is still present in the unconscious layers of personality and they exert influence on our psychological functioning. According to psychoanalysts, projections are revealed in the form of excessive sensitivity to perception of unaccepted elements in the behaviour of other persons.

In the field of social research, projection is defined as **perception of events and incentives from environment** (in particular the ones that are ambiguous) **from the point of view of one's own expectations, needs or endeavours**.

Projection as research method

The first person to use the projection method in research was American psychologist, L.K. Frank, who wrote in 1937 that in his opinion, the projective method for the study of personality consists in „presenting the subject a stimulating situation that does not have any meaning for them arbitrarily determined by the experimenter, but that will be able at the same time to have a meaning because the personality of the subject will impose its own individual meaning and organisation". To translate this quotation into a more contemporary language, one can say that **research with the use of projective methods consists in providing** the examined persons with **stimulus material that does not have an unambiguous, obvious structure**. The task of the examined persons consists in **giving meaning to it or interpreting it**.

Depending on the type of applied projective technique, the examined persons are subjected to **two types of stimuli**: **verbal and visual**. Verbal stimulus is usually a single word or an entire sentence.[60] Visual stimulus is as a rule represented by various drawings or photographs.[61] These stimuli have multiple meanings, even a bit enigmatic, which gives the examined person the possibility of individual and free interpretation of issues. It is believed that because human perceives the world through the prism of their personality, the ambiguity of the situation and freedom of choosing the behaviour generate the conditions for insight in values, motivations, opinions and emotions of the examined person.

The area in which projection was used on a broad scale for the first time was clinical psychology. The most popular projection tests in this field include Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), Rotter Incomplete Sentence Blank, Rorschach inkblot test and Word Association Test. These tests in their original versions are used in clinical practice and they serve as assistance in the diagnosis of causes of personality disorders. One of the advantages of these tests is that they are standardised, which allows for common application by clinical psychologists and relatively objective interpretation of results.

The most frequent method for collection of information about the motives of consumer behaviour is asking directly, for instance: "Why have you bought this product?" or "What is wrong with this product in your opinion?". The drawback of this method is that it is based on declarations of consumers. A consumer gives us a reason or declares such a behaviour that comes into their mind at that moment, which does not necessarily reflect all the reasons of their behaviour. A consumer may be unaware of some of them or

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[60] Verbal techniques – they consist in associating stimulus-words, completing sentences or answering special questions.
[61] Picture techniques – they consist in describing the content of presented pictures, the consequences of presented scenes or causes of the presented situation.

unwilling to tell us about them due to various reasons. If we suspect such a situation, we have to resort to projective tests.

The first application of the projective method in marketing research occurred in 1950s in the United States, and it was related to placing of Nescafe on the market.[62] It was the first instant-type coffee placed on the American market. The target group, i.e. the consumers at which the product was oriented, was constituted by housewives. After several months of advertisement campaign, the producer of the coffee had to face the following problem: despite extremely intense campaign, the sales of the product were clearly much lower than expected. When asked why they do not purchase Nescafe, the consumers responded that it did not taste well. These answers did not match the knowledge possessed by the producer of the coffee. Prior to product placement on the market, research has been conducted in which the taste of the new coffee was tested by means of blind test, in which the preferences of consumers were checked. In this test each consumer was given two cups of coffee. One contained Nescafe whereas the other Maxwell House. After tasting, the consumers were to indicate the cup with the coffee that tasted better. Of course they did not know which coffee is in either cup. The results of these test demonstrated that the taste of Nescafe is rated higher than the taste of competitive brand. Hence, on the one hand, they had results of preference tests that indicated that consumers like Nescafe more, and, on the other hand, this coffee was not purchased, and inappropriate taste was named as the reasons for that. The producer of the coffee has come to a correct conclusion that the consumers' answers to direct questions about the reasons for lack of interest in the coffee will not provide the solution of the problem of low sales. Therefore, another methodological solution was used, and it consisted in combining projective test and experimental method. Research was conducted in which the consumers were assigned to two groups at random. Afterwards, both groups were presented with an everyday shopping list that contained such items as flour, butter, bread, etc. There was only one difference in the lists in two groups. The list for the first group contained Nescafe instant coffee while in the case of the other group it was traditionally brewed coffee – Maxwell House (the main competition). Examples of such shopping lists are presented below.

List 1	List 2
$^1/_2$ kg of beef	$^1/_2$ kg of beef
loaf of bread	loaf of bread
bunch of carrots	bunch of carrots
can of peaches	can of peaches
Nescafe instant coffee	Maxwell House ground coffee
butter	butter
2 kg of potatoes	2 kg of potatoes
20 dg of ham	20 dg of ham
1 kg of flour	1 kg of flour

The subjects were asked to imagine, on the basis of presented shopping list, a person to which the list belongs and to describe them in terms of age, appearance, lifestyle and personality. When the descriptions have been compared, it turned out that the person described on the basis of the shopping list with Nescafe was more often defined as "lazy" and "neglecting the house". This result has clearly shown that the problem with placing the new coffee on the market was not caused by its inappropriate taste, but by the disadvantageous image of the potential user among the consumers at which the product was oriented.

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[62]   M. Haire, *Projective Techniques in Marketing Research,* Journal of Marketing, vol. 14 (April, 1950), p. 649–656.

This research has also demonstrated how the mechanism of projection used in projective techniques functions. The consumers had to imagine a person to which the given shopping list belonged, meaning that they made a projection of the image of the person that buys a specific brand of coffee.

First use of projective methods in social research

One of the first persons to use and develop projective methods in social research were American sociologists, who applied and still apply this type of methods to study racial prejudices.[63] They had two forms. One was constituted by incomplete sentences expressed in third person, for instance:

- *"Any time a Negro sits beside him in a bus, John…",*
- *"Crossing a Negro district is…"* or
- *"Jane thinks that Negroes are…".*

The task of respondents consisted in completing the sentences. The other form of these tests was constituted by unambiguous cartoon stories which the respondents were asked to comment. In one of the cartoon tests, the examined persons were shown a drawing presenting such a scene:

"There are two men on a street, one of them is white, and behind him there is a black Negro running with a wallet in his hand".

Although none of the respondents admitted in the questionnaire editions that they are prejudiced against Negroes, it turned out that the prejudiced ones interpreted the picture in a different way than the unprejudiced ones. The unprejudiced ones described the situation in the following way:

"The white man lost the wallet, and the Negro is running towards him in order to give it back".

The prejudiced ones described the situation in the following way:

The Negro has just stolen the wallet of the white man" (although the Negro should be running in the opposite direction in such case!).

Projective methods turn out to be very useful in the research not only on racial prejudice, but also on all the other social issues and problems that carry the burden of "social approval". They include, among others, attitudes towards sexual minorities, attitudes towards HIV carriers, abortion, in vitro, cross in front of the presidential palace, etc.

Qualitative and quantitative research and projective techniques

Projective techniques are used in social and marketing research **as supplementation of research techniques rather than research on its own**. **They are most often used in implementation of research by means of qualitative methods**. It results mainly from the fact that they are one of the so-called free techniques of collecting information with low standardisation level, and they provide the most useful information in the so-called explorative (initial) stages of a research project. **Some of them can be** successfully **used** also **in quantitative research**.

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[63]   I.R. Weschler, R.E. Bernberg, *Indirect Methods of Attitude Measurement*, International Journal of Opinion and Attitude Measurement, vol. 4, 1950, p. 209–228.

Types of projective techniques

1. Association methods

They are based on the classical technique used many years ago by Swiss psychologists, Carl Jung, in the research on mental disorders (among others fixation). The task of the subject is to respond to stimuli presented by the persons conducting the research using the first word, image or observation that comes to mind. These techniques are oriented at immediateness of response by limiting the share of mental processes in it. The examined person is not expected to contemplate or think logically, but rather to respond by means of any concept or word that first comes to mind, irrespective of the reasonability thereof.

Association techniques prove useful mainly in situations where we want to obtain information on the associations and vocabulary used by persons to describe brands, whole product categories, situations or behaviours. Such a knowledge will be subsequently used e.g. in the creation of advertisement campaigns. Owing to the application of the association technique, we know what words can make up the so-called "keywords". The use thereof in advertisement slogans causes that the persons at which the advertisements are aimed will be attracted by them, and they will initiate a series of positive associations connected with a brand or category of products.

An example of such a test, which could be used as an auxiliary tool for the study of attitudes towards the European Union, is presented below. The subject is supposed to name the fist association that comes to mind in reference to each word.

Word		Association
European Union	-	……………………
Brussels	-	……………………
Euro	-	……………………
European Parliament	-	……………………
MEP	-	……………………
etc.		

The associations of the subjects received from such a test can be analysed both in terms of emotions (e.g. "I like it" – "I do not like it") and in rational terms (e.g. advantageous – disadvantageous).

2. Constructive methods

These are the techniques in which the task of the subject is to create or construct a thing that usually has an artistic form, for instance a story or picture. As opposed to association techniques, the constructive ones require the subject to perform more complex intellectual operations instead of formulating simple associations only. A typical example of such a test type is presentation of a series of **ambiguous pictures**. The subject is asked to tell a story about a picture: "What is happening there?", „ How did it happen?", "What will happen in the future?". Examples of such pictures are presented in picture 1A and 1B.

The main advantage of constructive techniques is that we can study more complex systems of motives for human behaviour owing to them. Presentation of a series of ambiguous pictures can be connected with decision-making processes or various situations when services or products are used. The story about the pictures told by the subjects can be a source of plentiful information on the complexity of

consumer decisions or barriers for the use of services or products. The visual form of these techniques is an additional advantage. In comparison with the questions asked during in-depth survey or questionnaire-based interview, the application of constructive techniques makes the tasks to be performed by the subjects interesting and absorbing for them.
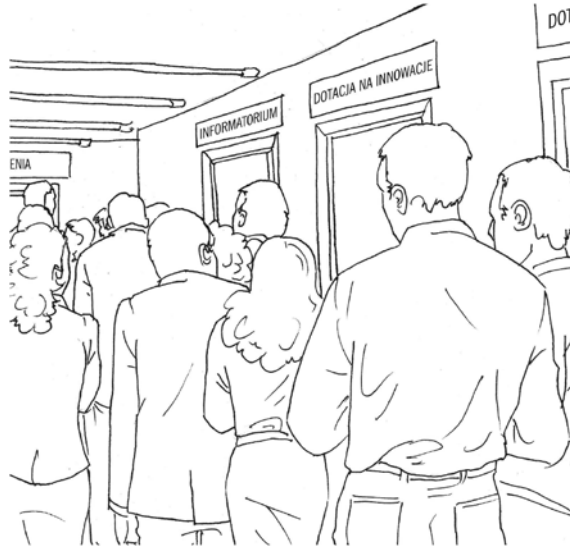

Fig. 1A. Exemplary picture used in constructive technique "EU subsidies for entrepreneurs"
Source: made for the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PAED).

Fig. 1B. Exemplary picture used in constructive technique
"Exhibition room for EXPO 2010 in Shanghai"
Source: made for the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development.

3. Completion techniques

The test material is incomplete, and the task of the examined persons consists in completing it in any way they wish. In comparison with association techniques, the difference is that both the stimuli and responses of the subjects are much more complex, and consequently the response of the subject is less direct. As compared to constructive techniques, the responses in completion techniques are less complex and limited to a greater extent. **Incomplete Sentence Blank** is the most popular example of this type of techniques. They serve the purpose of collecting the first responses, uncensored by the process of rational analysis, to the problem in question and defining the relation of respondents to it. Examples of such tests and collected results are presented in Tables 1A-1D.

Table 1A. Incomplete Sentence Blank – **Example 1**

Ecology in the operation of the office comprises……………………
Environmental management in the office consists in…………………
Negative influence on the environment in the operation of the office
can be reduced by means of………….. …………..………..………….
If I were the President of (name of the institution), I would begin the "Eco-action" with…………
(name of the institution) can become an environment-friendly institution due to…………………
Energy savings in (name of the institution) can be made e.g. by means of…………
Waste management in (name of the institution) should consist in………………
An incentive for employees of (name of the institution) to act in an environment-friendly way can
be constituted by………………..………….

Source: PAED – materials used for identification of Eco-areas in everyday actions of institutions in accordance with the Strategic Plan of PAED for 2010–13.
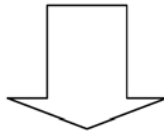
Table 1B. Exemplary indications of respondents in the Incomplete Sentence Blank

An incentive for employees of (name of the institution) to act in an environment-friendly way can be constituted by………
• **"environmental tax"** – cutting rewards for the teams that "do not act in an environment-friendly way";
• **"President's competition"** – e.g. for an idea or action for the environment;
• **"team-building"** for the team distinguishing itself in "environment-friendly activity";
• **"increase in the pool of rewards, bonuses for saved money"**;
• **eco-events**, e.g. collection of the entire paper/plastic waste from the entire week and gathering them in a visible place in the company in order to show the scale of the problem on a global scale or on average per one employee, etc.

Source: PAED – materials used in the survey "identification of Eco-areas in everyday actions of institutions".

Table 1C. Incomplete Sentence Blank – **Example 2**

> The PAED's strategy for 2010-13 is ……………..
>
> The PAED's strategy for 2010-13 was created in order to ……………..
>
> If I were to personally decide the future of the PAED's strategy, then ……………..
>
> If PAED does not implement the Strategy for 2010-13, then……………..
>
> If PAED implements the Strategy for 2010-13, then……………..
>
> The person(s) responsible for PAED's Strategy for 2010-13 is (are) ……………..
>
> The 2010-13 Strategy will change …………….. in my work.
>
> The 2010-13 Strategy will fail if……………..
>
> For the Management, PAED's strategy for 2010-13 ……………..
>
> The PAED's strategy for 2010-13 is for PAED what is …………….. for ……………..
>
> The main task for PAED for the coming three years is to ……………..

Source: PAED – materials used for identification of key areas in the context of implementing the Strategic Plan of PAED for 2010–13.

Table 1D. Incomplete Sentence Blank – **Example 3**

> The biggest problem in my contacts with Applicants is …………
>
> The biggest problem in my contacts with Beneficiaries is …………
>
> If I were to personally decide on the changes in my RFI, then in first place …………
>
> RFI is for PAED what is …………….. for ……………..
>
> PAED is for RFI what is …………….. for ……………..

Source: Questions used in a CAWI survey among the employees of Regional Financing Institutions under RFI Evaluation (PAED 2010)
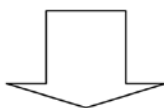
The biggest problem in my contacts with <u>Beneficiaries</u> is …

- *there are no problems 32%*
- *difficulties with explanation of procedures 16%*
- *inattention/attitude of beneficiaries 14%*
- *misunderstanding of competition rules 12%*
- *negative approach towards RFI employees 7%*
- *difficulties in contacts (telephone/e-mail) 3%*
- *lack of time 2%*

The biggest problem in my contacts with Applicants is …

- *there are no problems 39%*
- *inattention/attitude of applicants 12%*
- *difficulties with explanation of procedures 9%*
- *misunderstanding of the competition 9%*
- *negative approach towards RFI employees 4%*
- *lack of time 3%*

Source: Report from Evaluation of Regional Financing Institutions ordered by PAED; 2010.

Another extension of the completion (association) technique is **"Cloud" test** – it consists in completion of the utterances of a person or persons presented in pictures (Fig. 2 and 3) by the respondent, **personification technique and its other types**, such as e.g. **"Chinese Portrait"** or **Brand Party Game.**[64] Its main goal is to describe the product category of a brand at issue in the decision-taking process as a person or persons. On the one hand, these techniques make it possible to learn the personality of the object in question (such as the Chinese Portrait), and, on the other hand (Brand Party), to examine the relations between the objects under research.

Fig. 2. Example of the "Cloud" test. "Meeting X on problem Y"

Fig. 3. Example of the "Cloud" test

[64] Brand Party Game – technique used in qualitative research, consisting in personification of individual brands as party participant. The respondents define the features of brands and interrelations between them in the situation of a party, which gives the picture of the social perception of brands and characteristic features attributed to them.

The respondents in **the Personification test** are to imagine a brand or institutions as a person. Afterwards, they are asked to describe various features of that person. For instance, we could ask the examined persons to imagine the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PAED), the Ministry of Regional Development or the Ministry of Science as a person and to answer the following questions:

- *What is their age?*
- *Is it a man or a woman?*
- *How do they like to spend their free time?*
- *What is most important for them in life? Etc.*

This technique proves very useful in the study on emotional elements of the image of product brands, services or institutions.

The "Chinese Portrait" technique is similar to personification, and it is applied to examine the emotional elements of image. The difference is that after imagining a brand as a person, the respondents are asked to attribute various elements that match them best in their opinion to that person. These elements come from various categories, for instance makes of cars, dog races, strains of flowers or feature films heroes. A typical instruction for the respondent in the application of this technique is as follows:

"Please, imagine brand X as a person and answer the question: Which make of car matches it the best? Which dog race? Which film hero is closest to this brand?" Etc.

In the case of using animals as a category in the Chinese Portrait, **the technique of animalisation is used**, which most often serves the purpose of identifying the features attributed to the examined objects through their projections as animals (e.g. a lion/bull signifies strength, a cheetah/leopard – quickness, a fox – cunning, a dog – loyalty, an owl – wisdom, an ant – industriousness, etc.). When analysing research results by means of such a technique, the researcher draws on the knowledge about a stereotype of perceiving particular animals or objects from other categories in a given cultural area.

Cat – always lands on four feet
Fox – cunning
Cougar – fast, agile
Owl – wise

Fig. 4. "Performer of the evaluation"
Source: Materials from classes with students of the Postgraduate Study for the Evaluation of Social Programmes
in the Institute of Sociology at the University of Warsaw.

Dog – friendly
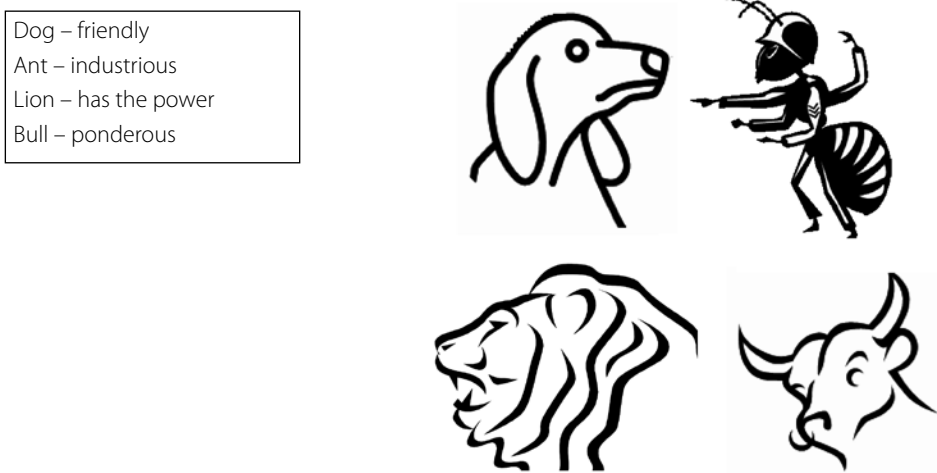Ant – industrious
Lion – has the power
Bull – ponderous

Fig. 4A. "The ordering party of the evaluation research"
Source: Materials from classes with students of the Postgraduate Study for the Evaluation of Social Programmes
in the Institute of Sociology at the University of Warsaw.

4. Choice and subordination techniques

In terms of simplicity of the responses required from the subjects, they resemble association techniques. The task of the subject consists only in choosing the possibility from among the named ones that meets specific requirements; these are usually similarity or attractiveness. **Photo-sort** is the most popular technique of that type. The subjects are presented with a set of photographs, for instance photos of various persons, and they are asked to choose the photos of persons that resemble for instance typical employees of Tax Office most. This technique proves perfectly useful in the study of stereotypes. Owing to it, we are able to learn the image of a "typical" employee of an institution or user of a product of a given brand.

5. Expressive methods

In most of these techniques, the examined persons, just like in the case of constructive techniques, are to link or combine the presented stimuli in a new entity. However, unlike the constructive techniques, the same importance is attached to the process of generating the product alone, as well as the method and style in which it is performed. **Collage and drawing** are **the most popular** expressive techniques. They are applied in particular in the case when the respondents can have problems with describing their feelings properly in relation to the examined issue.

In the case of Collage technique, the persons participating in the research are presented with photographs of, among others, persons, places, items, housing interiors, landscapes, social situations, etc. Afterwards they are asked to choose the photos that they associate with what is the subject of our research most. Just like in the case of other techniques, it can be an institution, person, product brand or service. Afterwards, the selected elements are arranged side by side (Fig. 5), and the subject is asked to justify why they have chosen precisely these photos, what there is in the photos, what the difference is

between them, and we also ask what else could be there in the photo if the frame was broader, etc. In a more advanced version, the respondents create the photo material on their own by taking the photos in situations connected with the research subject.
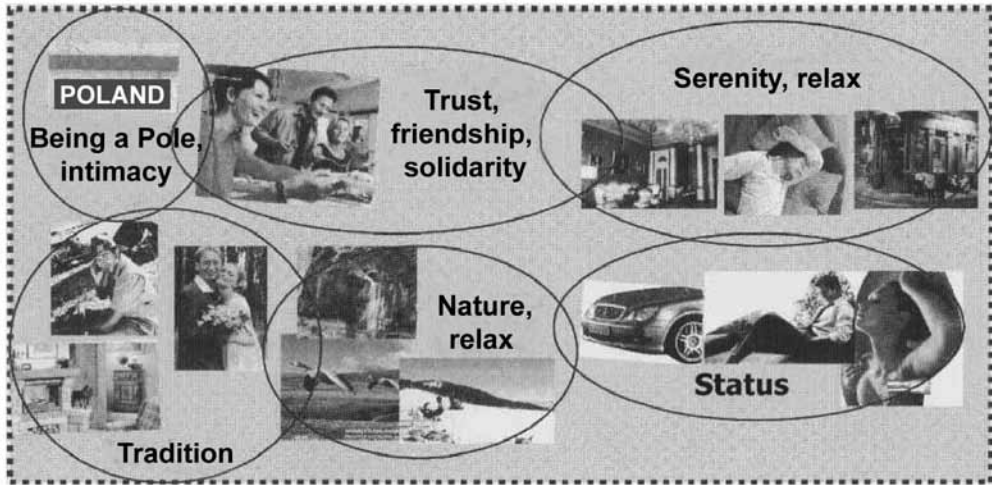

Fig. 5. Collage

Drawing is a technique in the case of which we ask the examined persons to draw a situation or to present the problems in question in the form of a drawing. A drawing (and other forms of artistic expression) rarely represents a means of expression for most persons, which results in treating them as the ones that are subject to decreased verification and control of the environment, which makes it possible to reveal more unconscious content. In the course of such a task, the respondent's memories and associations are stimulated which are connected with unconscious content, and, what is essential for these techniques, the presented content includes less "censored" material. By creating either a drawing or a collage, a respondent is not able to fully "control" their subsequent interpretation. This feeling of anonymity decreases the anxiety and hence the attitude of control and defence. Consequently, unexpected issues emerge that can be used in further discussion and in the cognitive process. Such a research approach facilitates the insight in the "imperceptible" and "unobvious" dimensions of the examined process and therefore new possibilities of grasping the nature of the analysed problem (Fig. 6).
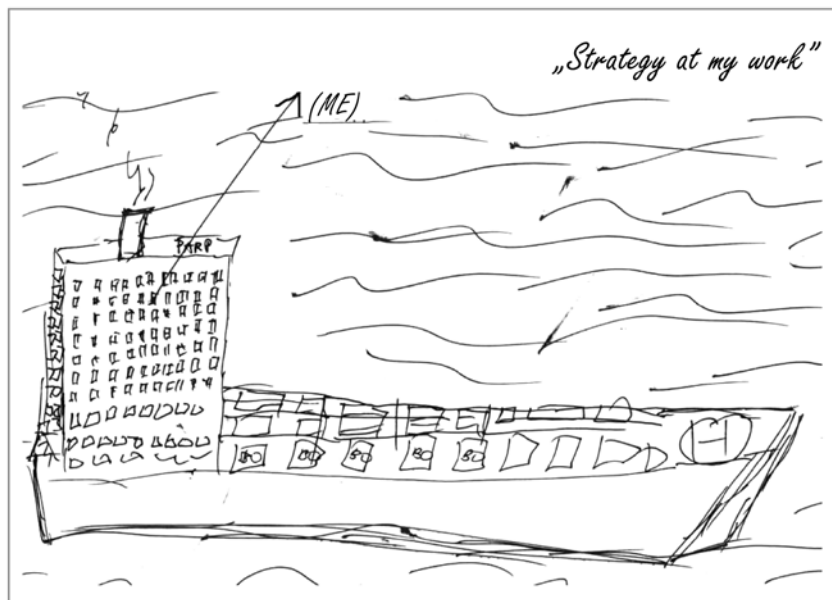
Fig. 6. Exemplary work of one of the participants of the session concerning the implementation of the institution's strategy[65]

When to apply projective techniques

Projective techniques are most often applied in the following situations:

1. **If we suspect that the participants might have problems with revealing their opinions directly, which might result from:**
    –   anxiety about social acceptance (e.g. when one has to admit that the main reason for a purchase of a car of a given make is prestige involved; when refusal to grant consent to construction of a residential road section is connected with envy that other inhabitants will have better access to work than we ourselves; admitting to have controversial political views),
    –   sensitivity of discussed topics (e.g. the problem of bribes; removal of waste; personal hygiene).

2. **If the examined person might not realise the real causes of their behaviour**, that is when we want to learn **the unconscious motives of behaviour** of the subjects – for instance a man might be convinced that he has chosen a car of a given make due to its technical properties, but in fact the choice of this car's make was affected by its image ("a car for real men"), or someone might declare that they are against the construction of a waste incineration plant due to unpleasant smell in its surrounding, but in fact they are afraid that the presence of the waste incineration plant might cause diseases of the respiratory system. In situation 1 and 2, it is constructive techniques, the "Cloud" test

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[65]   The research has been carried out just after the official acceptance and announcement of the PAED Strategy document and delivery of the internal bulletin of the institution for employees, which describes the process of creating the document, presents photos and contains statements of the Management Board and participants of the process concerning the main strategic objectives.
The presented drawing demonstrates one of several types of feelings towards the documents in attitude "Me and the strategy of the institution" that arose in the examined group of employees.
The applied technique was one of many used for the purpose of better identification of the attitude of employees towards the strategy. The research was aimed at facilitating the process of implementing the strategy and preparing the assumptions for the measures involving the employees in the implementation of objectives and strategic projects.

and Incomplete Sentence Blank, that prove most useful. In the case of these techniques, it is relatively easy to conceal the goal of the research, and they are absorbing for the respondent at the same time. Owing to that, it is easier to gather information on sensitive and controversial subjects on the one hand and to break barriers "of the internal censor" for unaccepted or unconscious motives on the other hand.

3. **If the problems** touched upon by the research **might be hard to verbalise**, meaning the case when the respondents have problems with describing their feelings properly in relation to the examined issue. It is the case most often when the subject of the research is the emotional field of the respondents. Then, it is easier to collect information by means of methods using metaphors and symbols – for instance a discussion about the image of brands, in particular in the emotional dimension, is too abstract for many persons and thus too difficult. In such a case, the techniques like "Chinese Portrait" or Collage are used most often.

4. If we want **to diversify the process of group interview**. The introduced projective techniques are a type of relaxing interlude for the participants (and for the moderator) and an interesting element for a change in a long-lasting and often tiresome interview. They are a perfect element mobilising the work of the group and activating less open individuals. They make it possible to change the session pace and possible "calming through a given task" in the case when conflicts or sensitive/ difficult subjects arise in the course of group interview.

5. If we want **to diversify the situation in which the respondent completes the questionnaire** – as a relaxing interlude or interesting element for a change in a long interview.[66]

6. In the case when we conduct a focus group interview, projective techniques can be used **to learn independent opinions of each group participant, excluding the probable impact of the group on these opinions**. In such a case, the information obtained by means of projective technique is a supplementation of the discussion and control of cohesion (or absence of cohesion) in the opinions of all participants at the same time.

7. **If we want to stimulate the creativity of the subjects**. Owing to the application of projective techniques, the subjects are more open, and hence their creativity level increases. Projective techniques release various types of experiences, feelings, they make it possible to reject stereotyped thinking, rational and critical opinions. It is particularly useful in testing new solutions and ideas, notably during the so-called creative groups (a type of Focus Group Interview, whose goal is to create new ideas). In such cases, just like in Point 3, the techniques of Personalisation, "Chinese Portrait" and Collage prove best.

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[66] All the above-mentioned techniques can be a part of the questionnaire used in quantitative research. The results of such tests are analysed the same way as the results obtained from open questions, e.g. Incomplete Sentence Blank "Consumption of alcohol in the public by teenagers"

1) When I see a young person drink alcohol in the public, then I ....

2) Teenagers drinking alcohol in the public are ....

3) Most persons noticing teenagers drinking alcohol in the public ....

4) Teenagers will stop drinking alcohol in the public when ....

The results of Incomplete Sentence Blank in the quantitative form (after answer coding): Elements of attitudes towards the problem of teenagers' drinking alcohol in the public:

– fear   20%
– feeling that there is no point making any comments 32%
– fear of aggression   28%
– indifference   5%
– bad example for others   26%

8. When we need to present the results to the party ordering the research in a different way that takes into consideration a broader context of analysed issues and **that will expose the recipient to research results – according to the Chinese adage "A picture is worth a thousand words"**.

To sum it up – the reasons for using projective methods in social studies does not always entail the application of projection mechanism in order to learn the unconscious motivation of subjects. Frequently, their function consists also in supporting the discussion, stimulation of creative thinking or, as in the case of group interviews, increase in integration of research participants.

Interpretation of projective tests' results

Since projective mechanisms can be subject to, besides unconscious motives, other defence mechanisms of the "ego", the interpretation of results is not always an easy task, and they should not be dealt with by persons without appropriate background. Unlike the projective tests applied in psychology, in social research there are virtually no standardised methods of interpreting the results of applied projective techniques. Efficient use of obtained results depends to a great extent on the experience, abilities and professional background of the researcher. The efficiency of interpretation is improved to a considerable degree by a situation when at least two persons interpret the obtained results individually.

Two approaches are generally used for the analysis of results of projective tests in research studies – quantitative and qualitative ones. In the case of quantitative approach, we count specific words or sentences put down or uttered by the examined persons and group them in larger categories at the same time. For instance when analysing the barriers to increasing the satisfaction with contacts with public administration offices, we could count utterances of respondents such as:

- *"When I came after work, it was already closed",*
- *"I did not manage to have all my business attended to before going to work",*
- *"It turned out business hours differ from what I thought", etc.*

and group them in a general category "OFFICE BUSINESS HOURS". In the analyses of that type, computer software such as Atlas or Etnograph proves useful.

In the case of qualitative approach, the interpretation of results of projective tests is the same as in the case of interpretation of results of qualitative research. Following initial structuring of the material, that is grouping it in more general categories of utterances, we look for recurrent topics that indicate which motives can drive the behaviour of examined persons. An efficient interpretation of results in this approach depends largely on the experience of the researcher.

It should be also kept in mind not to apply projective methods in social research as the sole independent method of collecting data. Projective methods constitute an ancillary and supplementary tool for other techniques used in the research.

Advantages and disadvantages of projective techniques

Just like in the case of other social study methods, projective techniques have their advantages and disadvantages.

The advantages include:
- they do not necessitate any "intellectual" skills of the subjects – their positive attitude towards the performed task connected with a given projective technique will do;

- they are absorbing, they stimulate the participants and they build group links;
- they provide a lot of information, in particular in the field of emotions;
- the subjects are not aware of the research goal;
- the utterances of respondents are free of the impact "of the internal censor";
- they give the researchers "a third eye" and "a third ear";
- they show the emotions governing the behaviour of respondents.

  The most important disadvantages of projective techniques **are**:
- no standardised interpretation – complexity, diversity, richness and unambiguousness of obtained information, which causes difficulties in interpretation;
- subjectivism of interpretation – choosing the content from among the collected material that is significant for the subject matter of research requires specialist background of the researcher (e.g. the knowledge of cultural contexts, knowledge from numerous domains, among others psychology, sociology);
- subjectivism of interpretation by the researcher – the conclusions can be a projection of subjective opinions of the researcher;
- problems with reliability of measurement; absence of standardised tools makes it difficult to compare the results of the research between various groups of persons and measurements carried out at different time;
- subjectivism of results – it is not always known what in a given case the manifestation of general mechanisms is, e.g. the cultural ones, and what a matter of individual experience of a given respondent is.

Conclusion

It should be pointed out at the end that, despite their age, **projective techniques are still one of the few methods of diagnosing the complexity of motives for the behaviour of human**. They make it possible to understand unconscious psychological barriers that can be present in the involvement of human being in various behaviours, both in the social dimension and the individual one. Their advantages make researchers both in social and marketing studies use them more and more frequently and eagerly. The level of use over time will probably increase both in qualitative and quantitative research. However, it should be kept in mind that in order to use them effectively, one needs proper interpretation of results that requires huge **experience and knowledge of the researcher**.

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Arkadiusz Wódkowski

The use of the Mystery Shopper method in evaluation of public organisations and NGOs

Introduction

Market research aims at identification of consumer needs. This knowledge enables adaptation of goods and services to the customer needs, so as to increase users' satisfaction and thus sales on commercial markets. The objective of the research in case of administration is an attempt to measure the satisfaction level (its growth or decline) so as to increase the prospective value of the indicator.

The surveys with customers of public organisations may consist in gathering declarations, but also in observations of the service quality level. The present chapter of the book explores this issue.

It transpires from the American government's research that 96% of dissatisfied customers do not complain about the service quality. If service is indeed bad, 91% consumers never return to the customer service centre. An exception to this rule might be a necessity in a situation of service monopoly. It should be assumed that similar indicators are even lower in Poland. It is particularly difficult to obtain information about the factors customer find particularly burdensome and that might have influenced their negative evaluation of the reality in customer satisfaction declarations. On the other hand, as consumers, we fail to lodge complaints, make entries in the complaint and grievances registers or send critical e-mails. Wherever possible, we simply change the service supplier. At present, the only way to obtain detailed knowledge on service quality is professional evaluation consisting of participatory observation. In this approach, the researcher declares the interest in the service (and often tries it), but the situation is pre-arranged with the sole purpose of measuring the service quality. Such an approach, if planned and regular, is known as Mystery Shopping (MS) research on service quality.

Defining service quality

Service quality might be defined as the level to which a given service meets the needs and expectations of the customers. Such a simplified definition is evocative of the quality definition of the ISO norm. It should be pointed out that it relates to two terms: needs and expectations. (...) The customers learn, become more experienced, their needs in life change, hence their needs concerning services follow. (...) Positive reinforcement effect takes place in services. When our expectations are low ("I do not expect anything good") and the real service quality is high, our assessment might be objective – reflecting the real quality level of the service, or even better than it is. When, however, our expectations are high, and the service quality poor, the quality assessment might be lower than it actually is. The office as an organisation and the customers constantly play games with each other. Higher quality level might generate higher level of expectations. It is hard to determine the existence of any kind of a border to expectations and quality. Quality management is an ongoing process, and quality itself is a value, an objective we strive to achieve. (...) At present, the quality of services is analysed in the context of customer

satisfaction, loyalty, relations and quality control. (...) Today it is agreed that service quality is not relative exclusively to the chosen qualities or factors. The whole process of service provision influences service provision processes.[67]

The essence of quality

Service quality is decisive for the strength of a service providing institutions and constitutes an element of the brand value. In a long-term perspective customer service directly translates into the market position of an institution, its image and, at times, to the decision concerning its liquidation. If diversification of the services rendered on the market is low, service quality determines the choice (should it be made). High quality builds customer loyalty, i.e. makes customers continue the relationship with a service provider, which gives an opportunity for an organization to reduce some costs.

Mystery Shopping is a response to the decrease in customer service quality. Their performance mates it possible to measure service quality in order to improve it in the future and eliminate competence gaps.

A customer subjectively evaluates the service. The evaluation is repeated at every occasion of a contact with the company, regardless, whether at the managerial level or in a warehouse. (...) Low quality of service results in customer dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction makes customers behave in a way which has a long-term negative impact on the company.[68] It is assumed in marketing that a satisfied customer relates their positive experience to 8 people, whereas a dissatisfied one informs 18 people about their negative experience.[69]

Overview of research methods

Many research methods, both quantitative and qualitative, are used to measure customer satisfaction. Satisfaction is usually measured with the quantitative approach. The most commonly used methods are in this case Paper and Pencil Interview (PAPI), Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI), Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) and increasingly popular Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI). To tackle the quality problem in-depth qualitative analysis is also performed, both with customers and employees of a given institution. The most common methods are Focus Group Interviews (FGI) and Individual In-Depth Interviews (IDI). When dealing with quality problems, companies and institutions often resort to the explicit audit procedure, i.e. observing employees in their natural working environment. An employee knows he/she is observed. The method assumes that after several encounters with customers, an employee will act naturally and he/she will stop to pay attention to the observer.

However, the basic method of quality measurement of customer service are Mystery Shopper observations. The definition of the method states that: "Mystery Shopping (also known as 'Mystery Client') is a type of analysis, where the auditor (Mystery Shopper) impersonates an ordinary customer, observes the purchasing process and makes notes from the observation on a special form. The auditor does not reveal himself/herself, hence the observed employee does not know when their work is under supervision. Activities of Mystery Clients are intentional and systemic".[70]

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[67] M. Bugdol, *Zarządzanie jakością w urzędach administracji publicznej. Teoria i praktyka* [*Quality management in public administration offices. Theory and practice*], Difin, Warsaw 2011, p. 18–21.

[68] W.W. Larson, *Obsługa klienta. Praktyczny poradnik dla tych, którzy nie lubią tracić czasu* [*Customer service. Practical guide for those who do not like to waste their time*], K.E. Liber Warsaw, 2007, p. 5.

[69] Reasons for customer losses according to MSPA, 18.04.2011 [qtd after:] http://hillway.pl/index.php/2011/04/powody-straty-klientow-wg-mspa/?wpmp_switcher=mobile

[70] *Badania marketingowe. Od teorii do praktyki* [*Marketing research. From theory to practice*], ed. Dominika Maison, Artur Noga-Bogomilski, GWP, Gdańsk 2007, p. 221.

Observation as a method of analysis

Scientific observation (and MS research aspire to be research of scientific background) is carried out in strictly determined conditions, systematically and objectively, maintaining records of what has been observed. Such a type of activity might become a source of much valuable information concerning behaviour and its causes.

Covert participant observation is in place wherever the observation could result in a change of the behaviour of the observed. The problem of privacy and aware decision concerning participation in the research raises ethical concerns. This type of observation is a source of the Mystery Shopping method.

The "Mysterious Client" method, used extensively to collect information concerning customers' experience relative to shopping and service provision, actually, constitutes the observation research. Such analyses usually focus on service quality assessment, customer-staff interactions, organisation and layout of the shop, product or service range and merchandising. Their aim is to assess the interactions of the customers with the directly contacting personnel and measure what a customer experiences in a centre of commerce, hotel or service centre.[71]

The observed person is unaware of the act of observation, but, at the same time, is under the observer's influence. For instance, an observer acts as a customer (not intending to buy), talks to the salesperson and observes their behaviour. At the same time, the observer manipulates the conversation in such a way, as to control the observation and gather as much data, as possible. The situation under observation is artificially provoked and controlled by the observer. (...) The example above, describes a situation when the observer acted as a customer to cover up the observation. The salesperson would act differently, should they know the "ordinary" conversation is in fact observation.[72]

The objectives of the MS analyses

The history of Mystery Shopping began in 1940s in the United States of America. Banks were pioneers of this method. A customer in disguise would come to a bank, make a payment in a given amount and observe, for instance, that they did not receive any receipt. Their task was to observe how transactions are executed.[73]

Many institutions have worked on the development of service quality assessment tools since. Professional MS monitoring determines the real customer service quality, enables identification of drawbacks in customer service, verifies effectiveness of standards of customer service currently in use and allows for efficient correction or design of customer service processes and successful implementation of a system which, *inter alia*, provides an opportunity to create a system of bonuses.

The MS analysis is also useful to optimise training system in a given institution. The results enable division of employees according to the competence gaps and selection of necessary training adapted to their needs. The MS programmes make it possible to: correct training programmes, diversify training programmes (regional, employees divided into segments), assessment of the employees' state of knowledge, assessment of the level of interpersonal abilities of the administration employees.

In the light of Esomar[74] definition, the Mystery Shopper aims at providing help to institutions as regards recognising and improving customer service standards through their comparison with objectives and standards of organisation expected by the customers. Trained observers gather the necessary information, by visiting branches of selected organisations and acting as prospective customers.

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[71] A. Gilmore, *Usługi. Marketing i Zarządzanie* [*Services, Marketing and Mangement*], PWE Warsaw 2006, p. 51.
[72] K. Kaczmarczyk, *Badania marketingowe. Metody i techniki* [*Marketing research, methods and techniques*], PWE Warsaw 1996, p. 277.
[73] Ilisha p. Newhouse, *Mystery Shopping Made Simple*, McGraw-Hill, USA, 2004, p. 2.
[74] ESOMAR – European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research.

MS methodology

Mystery Shopping provides opportunities to look at the company or institution from a customers' perspective. It is a source of objective support for managers creating quality management programmes and training programmes for employees.

M. Hesselink, T.van der Wiele and the ICC/ESOMAR[75] code describe the analysed method in a following way: "well-trained persons, acting as ordinary customers, are closely observing what is good and what needs improvement in the customer service from the customer's perspective".[76]

M. Meder adds: "Mystery Shopping consists in observation of personnel's behaviour in direct contact with a customer by a trained employee (called the auditor) impersonating a customer. Mystery Shopping is covert observation (the employee of an institution does not know they are dealing with an auditor), controlled (the observer interacts with the employee following a detailed assessment scenario), and standardised (an auditor focuses on particular aspects, which they subsequently note on a standard form after the conversation)".[77]

C. Stucker has described the method in a following manner: "A mysterious customer comes to the shop disguised as an ordinary customer and follows the example of other customers – asks questions, makes purchases, returns commodities – but with feedback. Following the visit, the mysterious customer fills in a report or a form, describing the visit in detail".[78]

Several key questions should be asked before the MS analysis: What or whom do you want to observe? When do you want to observe? How will you register data? What is the level of result interpretation expected from the observer?

In order to understand the method it is worth to realise that MS is a natural process. All participants: auditors and the observed persons remain anonymous throughout the project. The persons subject to observation should be notified about the upcoming audits. The research tools should be constructed in such a way as to analyse facts. All auditors should act naturally and resemble the customer profile of a company.

Types of audits

There are three types of audits, according to the types of auditors who carry them out. These are: individual direct audits, business direct audits and expert audits.

Direct individual audits are the most common type of observation in customer service centres. An auditor undertakes to use the service (and, if such possibility exists, uses the service), being anonymous to the service provider. It is important for the auditor to belong to the group of recipients of a given service, to fulfil customer criteria (e.g. in territorial units audit, to be a resident of a particular area). An auditor goes to a service centre where they conduct a systematic, planned observation of customer service. The assessment covers such forms of sellers' behaviour, as: greeting, recognising customer's needs, optimum selling offer and goodbye. Audits are conducted in such a way as not to interfere with the ordinary activity of the observed institution.

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[75] The ICC/ESOMAR code – the contents in Polish may be fund at the Web pages of the Polish Society of Market and Opinion Researchers – http://www.ptbrio.pl.

[76] See: M. Hesselink, Wiele, T. van der., *Mystery Shopping: In-depth measurement of customer satisfaction*, Research Paper ERS; ERS-2003-020-ORG, Erasmus Research Institute of Management (ERI, RSM Erasmus University, p. 3; *Mystery Shopping Studies*, Esomar World Research Codes & Guidelines, 2005, http://www.esomar.org/, (25.04.2007), p. 2.

[77] M. Meder, *Zastosowanie metody mystery shopping w bankowości detalicznej* [*The use of mystery shopping in retail banking*], Marketing i Rynek, 5/2005, p. 15.

[78] C. Stucker, *The Mystery Shopper's Manual: How to get paid to shop in your favorite stores, eat in your favorite restaurants, and more!*, Special Interests Publishing, USA, 2004, p. 23.

Direct business audits – an auditor is a company who attempts to make a purchase as an institutional client. They need to have a personality (an office, visiting cards, phone number and e-mail address), and, if possible, they need to be a real institution with the qualities of a potential client. As a rule, research is conducted on the basis of small samples of 10 to 20 observations. They serve to diagnose competence areas better performed by the competition. Such qualities as negotiation flexibility, client service level, knowledge of business counsellors are subject to scrutiny.

Expert audits are strictly qualitative analyses, usually performed by several persons – experts in quality customer services, trainers or psychologists. Such audits are usually pilot analyses, which enable getting into specificity of the problem and making it possible to familiarize with the rules prevailing in a given sector or company. Analyses performed in this manner are to gradually increase in significance.

J. Rappold believes that the said method includes, simply speaking, personal, phone, e-mail or letter contact with a company as a prospective client.[79] Hence these are standard contact forms with companies. This is also how the analysis is conducted. Statistics on contacts with institutions should be consulted beforehand. All in order to make audits as natural, as possible.

In case of contacts via e-mail, an auditor assesses the following: whether the response is automatic or personalised, waiting time for the response, understanding of customer's needs, way of responding to questions and clarity of responses.

At a telephone encounter, an auditor focuses on: waiting time for connection, number of persons talked to at one connection, active or passive attitude of the person they talked to, products and services offered and knowledge of the offer, general time of the conversation.

During a visit in a sales point, the auditor concentrates on the following observations: cleanliness of the customer service centre, its whereabouts and inside, personnel accessibility, maintaining eye contact, recognition of customer needs, knowledge of products, etc.

Observation areas

An auditor concentrates on several levels of observation, starting from the very basic ones such as: physical characteristics of the observed persons, their clothes, personal hygiene or even the use of cosmetics. Other levels are formal qualities of verbal behaviour, observation of personal traits and any inconsistencies of the behaviour, e.g. between the verbal and nonverbal signals. The behaviour of the observed person in the interaction with the auditor is also subject to scrutiny. Particular focus is put on emotional states of the observed. Many researchers do not resign of subjective evaluation, asking the auditors for comments in writing about their impressions and attitudes. However, more emphasis is put on discourse analysis, particularly content analysis of responses in the context of the preceding questions. Formal qualities of the statements of the observed are also subject to analysis. When determining the observation areas, one should not resign from decoding of contents in the context of emotions that accompany the conversation. To conclude, it would be advisable to include descriptions of nonverbal behaviour of the observed persons and the description of their appearance.

Nonverbal behaviour is also subject to monitoring, including: body language, facial expressions (fear, surprise, anger, distaste, sadness). Auditors also observe spatial behaviour, e.g. distance from the customer, from objects. Paralinguistic behaviour is an important element of further analyses: the pace of talking, the volume, the tendency to interrupt, specific emphases and, certainly, linguistic behaviour, mostly the contents of the speech. Auditors focus as well on aesthetic aspects of the service, e.g. cleanliness of the floor, or the order of forms to be filled in by customers.

[79]   J. Rappold, *Get Paid to Shop. Opportunities in Mystery Shopping*, Business Resources, USA,1998, 2000, p. 3.

Specification of the MS method

The MS balances between quantitative and qualitative analysis. The results are presented in quantitative, but also in qualitative, form, e.g. open question analysis, soft elements of assessment, subjective statements. In a typical quantitative analysis, the researcher does not have contact with field researchers, they obtain the file with the results instead; in the MS analysis the researcher can play the role of the coach of auditors. Hence in this case the contact with implementation division is constant and extended.[80]

The employing entities have specific expectations concerning persons responsible for the project from the auditing institution. The researcher should have the following qualities: they should be very involved, flexible, ready for ongoing conflict solving, reliable, punctual and honest in informing about problems.[81]

Stages of execution of the MS analysis

The first step is development of a scenario with customer profile and description of the analysed situation (several customer profiles may be used in order to verify services in diverse market segments). Once the scenario is completed, a questionnaire concerning selected aspects of service provision should be developed. The questionnaire may include both the questions which may be answered in an objective way by the auditor and the subjective opinion about the service process. Another step is selection of auditors to carry out the research. In order to receive good quality results, it should be borne in mind that actual profile of auditors (e.g. age, education) should as much as possible resemble the profile determined in the scenario and that all information provided at the conversation be true. Further stage is auditor training. The training is a sole opportunity to provide knowledge to auditors about the analysis objective and assumptions. An intensive training of the auditors consists in detailed presentation of the scenario of the analysis, key aspects of service provision processes and the way of filling in the form. Subsequently, a pilot research is performed, which aims at verification of the prepared analysis in practice. After several test visits, final amendments to the scenario and the questionnaire are made. At the moment of the actual analysis, attention should be paid to diligent documentation of every visit. Registration of the results should be made immediately after each visit and there should be no possibility of documenting the process following several visits, as it significantly decreases the quality of the information gathered. The MS analysis is completed by the development and communication of its results. Bothe presentation of objective (waiting time, meeting time, number of persons waiting etc.) and subjective (quotations from auditors' notes, examples, assessment of the meeting, etc.) elements are possible. The results are usually developed in the form of a report in writing and communicated in a form of a presentation for the managing staff.[82]

Request for quotations

Prior to sending the request for quotations, institutions decide about execution of the project with their own means or its outsourcing. If there is a possibility of being anonymous, impartial and neutral, it is possible to carry out the project internally.

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[80] Researchers specialising in Mystery Shopper, records from the discussion of 19.01.2010 organised by the Polish Society of Market and Opinion Researchers.

[81] Commissioning Parties specialising in Mystery Shopper, records from the discussion of 20.01.2010 organised by the Polish Society of Market and Opinion Researchers.

[82] M. Meder, *Zastosowanie metody Mystery Shopping w bankowości detalicznej* [*The use of mystery shopping in retail banking*], Marketing i Rynek 5/2005.

Both preparation of the analysis and its execution may be requested by the decision maker from their own employees or from specialised research agencies. The decision concerning the entity to perform the analysis depends on external factors (company's size, skills and experience of employees, organisational structure of the company, funds for research accessible, etc.), and on the internal factors: situation on the market of research services, research schedule, costs, etc. Outsourcing of the service should be performed in a way similar to the purchase of any other service.[83]

The request for quotations (the brief of the research) or terms of reference should include the most significant information necessary to develop the research tools, specification of the background, objective and deadline for project execution.

The research agency and the entity commissioning the project should determine the following data: how extensive the service network is, how many service centres are to be researched, whether the analysis aims at the development of a ranking list, what are the characteristics of the service networks (strategic situation of service centres), description of the current standards of service quality, which is the key objective of the research (diagnosis of the situation, ranking list, planned training, etc.), the qualities and tasks of a typical auditor, whether authentic service provision is necessary, preferred forms of result presentation, whether monitoring of competing centres is necessary.[84]

The art of buying good research services is no different from the art of buying anything else. The purchasers who are aware of their needs pertaining to the research and who know how much they are willing to spend on it, and when they need the results, make less mistakes at the stage of selection of the agency, than a manager who is only vaguely aware of the above.[85]

Stages of MS programme

Each Mystery Shopping monitoring starts with specification of standards of customer service. In an ideal situation they should be tested on groups of customers and experts. The key factor is whether the standards are compliant with the specification, the needs of the group of final recipients, and whether they are feasible. It is also important to determine the approach of employees to standardisation, whether they accept the standards and are willing to observe them. If all assumptions are confirmed at this stage (by customers, experts and employees), the stage of development of research tools may begin. Practically all standards may be converted to research questions. It should be remembered that answers should be of the 0-1 character, i.e. "yes" or "no". In many types of the MS research emphasis is put on particular factors which are used for the development of ranking lists at a later stage. The tool should be field-tested, with respect to pilot audits. The next stage consists of auditor selection and training. Thus auditors enter the phase of proper audits. These consist of information gathering during the conversation with a customer service employee, hence observation is directed to the customer service team. If possible, it is recommended to use the actual service. Control, data introduction and report preparation follow field research.

The launch of the MS programme

Should the decision about the Mystery Shopping project be made, all the interested parties, especially the evaluated employees, should be informed. The employees should know the evaluation

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[83]   Z. Kędziora, K. Karcz, *Badania marketingowe w praktyce* [*Marketing research in practice*], PWE, Warsaw 2007, p. 50.

[84]   M. Hesselink, Wiele, T. van der., *Mystery Shopping: In-depth measurement of customer satisfaction...op. cit.*, p. 5.

[85]   Z. Kędziora, K. Karcz, *Badania marketingowe w praktyce* [*Marketing research in practice*] *op. cit.*, p. 60.

criteria. At this occasion, they will be able to get to know the standards of customer service. This will also be a clear message from the Board about the key standards. Usually the questionnaire is 4-8 pages long, and the book of standards – several dozen pages long.

If possible, standards should be announced, printed and placed in an easily accessible place for the information of the employees (Intranet, notice board). It is essential that it is not an ordinary list of wishes, but commonly accepted principles of conduct.

Acceptance of the programme at all management levels is also a key factor here. Managers must really support the programme. This may be achieved by presentation of the results in the forms accepted in a given company (e-mail, Intranet, newsletter, company paper). It should be borne in mind that the contents do not affect anyone's personal rights. An attempt should be made to present only the leaders of the customer service ranking list, otherwise employees may lose motivation.

Selection and tasks of auditors

An ideal auditor has a good memory and acting abilities. He/she is neutral in judgement, discreet, reliable and punctual. Persons assessing the quality of customer service should receive proper training and extensive information introducing them to the project.

When the observed employee feels they are being observed, they might play the role of "the good employee". This aims at fabricating a true-to-life, realistic behaviour. Should this happen, final reports will be faulty and useless for the commissioners.[86] Therefore, it is essential that auditors remain anonymous till the end of the field operation.

The literature of the subject most often describes an ideal auditor as: reliable, organised, with good memory, observant, objective, time-flexible, honest, detail-oriented, intelligent, articulate, responsible, eager to learn, neat, communicative, patient and critical.[87]

The key to the auditors' work is being impartial and as objective as possible. It is essential that they stick to the scenario in detail. The supervising researchers must make it known that each audit is exceptional and each report must contain records of exceptional experience, which means that comments should not be copied or standardised. It is highlighted that the auditor should remain anonymous to the end, it must not be discovered that an actual audit is taking place. The whole philosophy of the method is that the auditor should check how a random customer is treated. If the employee knows they are providing service to the auditor, the research as a whole fails to be equivalent to the real life experience,[88] and its results must not be included in the research process.

The story of an auditor's life

This is a constant description of the auditor's behaviour and qualities. It involves specific directions and responses to answer the service-provider in case of more specific questions during the conversation. As a rule such a description consists of 10 to 30 variables. That is why persons are often selected, who not only physically resemble potential customers, but share their personality types, professional, family, or even financial conditions. Some descriptions might be fairly complicated and an auditor, who at least partially shares the characteristics of the group of recipients (real customers) has a simpler task to perform. The story of life also contains detailed information about the behaviour the auditor should express in

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[86] Janac L., Weis J., *How to Start and Run Your Own Mystery Shopping Company...op. cit.*, p. 67.
[87] See: C. Stucker, *The Mystery Shopper's Manual...op. cit.*, p. 33–36; Ilisha p. Newhouse, *Mystery Shopping Made Simple...op. cit.*, pp. 1–2
[88] See: C. Stucker, *The Mystery Shopper's Manual...op. cit.*, p. 132,152,159–161,167–169; Rappold J., *Get Paid to Shop...op. cit.*, p. 9; L. Janac, J. Weis, *How to Start and Run...op. cit.*, p. 87.

particular stages of the conversation with the representative of the investigated network. This makes us certain that none of the auditors steered the conversation individually, failing to provide opportunities to the employees to fulfil the expected standards.

The elements of the "story of life" are: gender, age, civil status, children, professional status, income, activity in life, contacts with the institution so far, behaviours related to the audited service. Each story of life is created individually for the needs of each new MS research.

While creating such stories, attention should be paid to avoid mistakes. The history should not be improbable, these should be stories that normally happen, auditors should resemble ordinary customers in their looks and behaviour. The story should not be too hard to remember, or too long (over 30 variables). Researchers should avoid stories which will be impossible to be used, or easy to found out as fake by the service employees.

Tasks for auditors should be, if possible: natural; should repeat in other audits executed in other service centres; should be detailed and precise, tested with auditors, understandable for all field researchers. Auditors should not be burdened with too many tasks to perform.

Development of research tools

The questionnaire – as any other tool – serves to achieve a certain goal, and it is not a type of a universal tool used in different ways to achieve many different goals.

The research tool for MS should be developed exclusively on the basis of service quality standards responding to the customer needs in a given field. Therefore, it would be pointless to undertake systematic and costly MS activities without the quality standards document.

The questionnaire of MS observations requires, as other tools, pilot activities. The tool should be field-tested at least twice in several observations, so that the researchers be sure that it is properly constructed.

Once the scenario (of auditor tasks) and the story of life are completed, a questionnaire concerning selected aspects of service provision should be developed. The questionnaire should be related to a specific situation and strategy of any organisation. Not only should the questionnaire cover the general quality aspects of the offered services, but it also should contain essential elements of performance improvement, as specified in the vision and mission of the company.[89] Moreover, the questionnaire should reflect customer service standards. There are many universal, commonly known principles of proper customer services and business procedures which would constitute an adequate basis for the questionnaire. However, each organisation has its specific requirements for the employees, that it wants to control. Thus an individual questionnaire form is developed for each company.[90] The questionnaire is filled in immediately after leaving the premises of a given centre. It consists of two separate parts. The first – general, contains closed questions, which results in its standardisation and the opportunity to formulate general remarks. The second part, is a descriptive one with the so-called open questions, which enable formulation of significant remarks and observations.[91] According to the authors, questionnaires should also provide space for comments. Comments should be provided usually at all negative responses and as conclusions of specific sections.

As the memory of an auditor is limited, as a rule, the questionnaire should be brief (standard length are 60-80 closed questions with the option of single response) and contain unanimous questions, which do not make room for unnecessary interpretation by the auditor.

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[89] M. Hesselink, Wiele, T. van der., *Mystery Shopping...op. cit.*, p. 5.
[90] L. Janac, J. Weis, *How to Start and Run...op. cit.*, p. 90.
[91] C. Stucker, *The Mystery Shopper's Manual...op. cit.*, p. 150.

A rare type of report is a narrative report, which describes the events that occurred at the audit. Such a report is up to 2 pages long and is chronologically organised. In such a case detailed information concerning the description is appended to the form.[92]

In Mystery Shopping questionnaire measurements it is recommended to use weights near the questions, which enables further development of ranking lists of employees.[93]

To conclude, gradation should be avoided in a questionnaire, responses should be maximally objective, subjective impressions of the auditor should be eliminated. Some room should be made in the analysis for subjective impressions of the auditor, albeit in a separate part of the questionnaire, which enables qualitative analysis of the responses. An opportunity which transpires from such a construction of the tools is the opportunity to compare quantitative data with subjective opinions of potential customers. A good questionnaire contains a specific order of stages of the visit (greeting, start of a visit, etc.). It enables standardisation (unification) of research conditions. A distinction exists depending on the importance of a given indicator. The question concerning the cleanliness of the mirror in the toilet is evaluated differently than the question of eye contact with the customer.

Sample selection

The research may be extensive, involving all the members of a given community, or non-exhaustive research with only the representatives of a given community (these are the so-called quota samples for the whole population).[94]

The quota sample is a group of persons who represent the population as a whole. While controlling quality in a given organisation, we are unable (due to limited time and funding) to control all the employees of a given service centre. That is why the analysis is performed at random. If a given network has a significant number of sales centres, our research, due to the same reasons (limits of time and funding) will be restricted to randomly selected centres. In such a case research samples include from 100 to 1000 observations. Due to the more and more frequent demand for ranking lists, analyses are covering all units, i.e. all centres or employees, which results in cost increase of MS analysis, but also in the increase of their objectivity.

Field implementation of the research

A Mystery Shopper may contact the investigated employees by phone, e-mail or personally. The research may be covert or overt, but in the second case the employees do not know the date. When employees know they might be subject to scrutiny, they try to comply with the customer service standards. This is a positive side effect of the Mystery Shopper method (apart from the results themselves)[95].

Measurement control

Control of Mystery Shopping measurement may be fairly easy if we have an opportunity of access to receipts, or if there is a necessity to issue an invoice, and at the same time, the sales rooms are monitored

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[92]　C. Stucker, *The Mystery Shopper's Manual...op. cit.*, p. 152.

[93]　Janac L., Weis J., *How to Start and Run...op. cit.*, p. 90.

[94]　L.A. Gruszczyński, *Elementy metod i technik badań socjologicznych* [*Elements of sociological research methods and techniques*], SWN WSZiNS, Tychy 2002, p. 83.

[95]　A. Kaniewska-Sęba, G. Leszczyński, B. Pilarczyk, *Badania marketingowe na rynku business-to-business* [*Marketing research on business-to-business market*], Oficyna Ekonomiczna Kraków 2006, p. 98.

by means of industrial television (e.g. at fuel stations). However, it may also be very difficult, if the observer does not make a purchase or the supplier refuses to issue the receipt (meals ordered by phone, pizza), and the audit takes place at the auditor's house. Each sector has its specificity and own methods of controlling auditors. In fact, this is a good area for investigation for researchers and executioners.

Reporting

Observation part of the task starts with the approach to the investigated institution. Some organisations want to know whether signs clearly indicate the route to the seat. Many research agencies ask such questions as: are external signs visible and well-kept? Are they lit in the evening? More detailed questions may be formulated in the following way: is parking big enough and comfortable in use? Was it not dirty and too soiled with car oil? Was the enclosure of the property well-kept? Were trash bins empty?

The researcher has to focus on all external conditions of the property, which need improvement to make the premises more attractive and accessible to customers. Having entered the observed premises, the auditor collects all characteristic information, listed on the questionnaire and explained in the instructions. The auditor should remember all factors that might influence customer attitude.

Managers of an institution may want to know, for instance, whether all lights are lit inside, whether the floor is clean or all exhibition stands are clear, neat and attractive, or whether information stands are properly exposed.

The auditor's observation may also include the music they remembered played, and conversations between the employees. In some cases an auditor will visit the restroom and comments on conditions therein. Therefore, such an analysis might be very detailed. However, it should be remembered, that the analysis depends on both the researched problem and the type of employing entity.

During the visit, the auditor observes employees' activity and listens to their conversations. Usually the managers want to know whether the employees greet customers immediately and warmly. Some require their employees to introduce themselves, while others require identification cards.

Auditors use the "Comments" part to communicate their general impressions concerning the service. If observations are made, which do not apply to specific issues, they may be included in the part of the form for such additional information. This is also the right place to confirm the exceptional quality of service.

Reporting form

When we request information about the course of events, we require an impartial and objective story. The scientific description separates observation from observation-based interpretation. A way to verify partiality of observation is comparison with more than one independent observer. The equivalence measurement of the two is used in the researched based upon the observation technique. The observer should take into consideration unexpected results and they should not formulate any preliminary assumptions.

At the beginning, they should reflect upon the recipients of the results. A message directed to the CEO is naturally different from those to managing staff or sales staff. If such decisions have already been taken, the form of result presentation should be selected. The most commonly used and popular tool is Power Point. It enables visual presentation of results, with graphs and tables informing about the data. Presentation of result is not limited to submitting the presentation to the commissioning entity. The

final project stage is the meeting of the commissioning entity with persons responsible for specific MS analysis.

The reports include quantitative data, i.e. the data that may be described by statistics. Results obtained on this basis may be presented by means of graphs, tables and ranking lists.

Qualitative data, i.e. the data obtained on the basis of a subjective description of the reality, constitute an important part of the report. Content analysis on the basis of arbitrary criteria.

Justification for the use of the MS method

The Mystery Shopping method is used mostly to monitor quality of service processes, motivate employees and make comparisons with the competition". (...) "With respect to quality measurement for service provision, Mystery Shopping focuses on investigation of compliance of employees' conduct with service provision standards.[96]

Institutions are inspired by various factors to undertake the MS research programme. In most cases these are internal factors, such as: the need of efficient employee management, the need to work out or verify internal customer service standards, extension of the organisation, development of a network of centres and, most of all, the need to reinvent the brand.

There are also several external factors motivating to initiate the MS analysis. In most cases these cover: signals from customers concerning the decrease in service quality, activities of institutions regarded as "competition" and the omnipresent, in the last few years, demand for certification, for instance, ISO.

The advantages of MS research

The main advantage of the MS research consists in the definition of the week and strong points of the customer service quality. Moreover, MS activities provide a unique opportunity for getting a customer's perspective on the institution. We are provided access to monitoring of the service network and grounds for objective comparison of particular units according to the standards in use. Monitoring clearly facilitates management of units. The MS results show tendencies and changes in a longer time perspective – results of activities (e.g. training) may be observed. The analysis of MS results enables to foresee their consequences and design directions for further development. Presentation of the results may constitute a good tool for introduction of employees. An apparent advantage of the MS research is transparent methodology.

Managers who use MS see many of its advantages. Among the key ones are applicability of results, which means possibility of implementation of conclusion almost instantly after the problem has been diagnosed. The advantage of the method is the influence on employees who provide customer services, or even stimulation of behaviours. Projects, which last for several years, provided that they are professionally executed, create a positive atmosphere in an institution, which may be described in the following manner: "each customer is an auditor". Employees of an institution use the same principles of service with respect to all customers, being aware than each and every one of those may be an auditor.

Among the many advantage of the principle, manager underline the fact, that reports contain facts and not declarations. The analysis of MS reports enable systematic assessment of managers and not, as it so often seems, employees directly providing customer services. After many years of experience,

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[96] M. Meder, *Zastosowanie metody Mystery Shopping w bankowości detalicznej* [*The use of mystery shopping in retail banking*], Marketing i Rynek 5/2005.

researchers notice, that it is paradoxically the persons who are not observed, who are subject to the evaluation. Indeed, it is the manager who is responsible for recruitment, training and motivation of the employee who contacts the customer.

Disadvantages of MS measurements

Doubts have been expressed as to whether Mystery Shopping can be used in public administration. A situation involving constant invigilation, raids, suspicions, etc. is difficult to imagine. Therefore audits using such method require approval of the employees, with this method being solely an auxiliary method that would supplement other applied service quality assessment methods.[97]

Critics of this method claim it does not permit any assessment of sales results; however, this was not its original purpose. A certain degeneration of this method can be often observed when the auditor acts as a judge or as an inspector instead of the original intention to act as a natural and objective observer.

Part of MS employing entities and contractors have ethical doubts regarding the fact that the audited entity is unaware of being observed. Another disadvantage of this method is the fact that only the current quality level is monitored and the audits should be carried out regularly, which might be expensive. Conversations with employing entities show that weak auditors may be recognised, which distorts the results of audit.

Another disadvantage of MS is the rare but present negative atmosphere surrounding this method which may be associated with the intention of dismissing employees. In some organisations managers cannot resist the temptation of applying disciplinary consequences, which is contrary to the sectoral codes of ethics.

The greatest mistake is to punish employees after the audit (in particular after the first audit). Also, indirect punishments should not take place. When punishing the superior, we punish the employees as well. Punished bosses would punish their subordinates either in a material or in a non-material way (e.g. through behaviour, mood swings or a negative organisational climate).[98]

One should keep in mind that Mystery Shopping is neither an entertaining shopping excursion nor an occasion to act as a difficult and unruly customer. Nor is it a chance to dismiss employees or a place for unloading one's negative emotions.[99]

MS audit may be disturbed by ill-selected or underperforming auditors or through a too large number of subjective questions in the questionnaire. If implemented in the organisation in the wrong way, the audit can bring the result that would be quite the opposite of what was intended. There is an actual threat of a negative impact of the audit on the employees, e.g. in the event of lack of appropriate project communication.

Ethical rules for MS measurements

The Code of the Mystery Shopping Providers Association,[100] the Code of ESOMAR[101] and authors of publications discussing this method present several rules for companies carrying out Mystery Shopping audits. The objective is to carry out the audit in an ethical way. These rules have been presented below.

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[97]　M. Bugdol, *Zarządzanie jakością w urzędach…(Quality management in public administration offices…), op. cit.,*. p. 209.

[98]　M. Bugdol, *Zarządzanie jakością w urzędach…(Quality management in public administration offices…), op. cit.,*. p. 208.

[99]　J. Rappold, *Get Paid to Shop...op. cit.,* p. 4

[100]　The largest association of research agencies applying the discussed method.

[101]　European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research.

1) The ESOMAR Code provides that auditors did not undertake any Mystery Shopping activities that might improve product distribution or its sales through creation of an alleged customer demand for a given product or service.[102]

2) One should not rely solely on the Mystery Shopping results when deciding on dismissals or reprimands. One should keep in mind that the auditor who complies with the rules has a different approach than the employing entity who wants to know the identity of the specific person who provided insufficient customer service. MS auditors must take any measures possible to ensure that individual privacy is respected and that the observed persons would not incur any loss or sustain any damage due to audit results.

3) Ethical approach requires that the customer's staff is notified in advance that the quality of their services might be from time to time analysed by means of Mystery Shopping.

4) Scenarios used during Mystery Shopping must be safe, i.e. buyers are not encouraged to get involved into any illegal activities, activities that would expose them to physical risk, activities that would require disclosure of their personal details against their will or activities that might lead to undesirable entries to registers and thus to further contacts with the buyers.

4) Elimination of the unjustified waste of time for the audited persons. Moreover, such observation should be basic and should not force the entity to any excessive activity. This concerns in particular observation of persons pursuing their own businesses and professionals, whose time has its direct cost.

5) The ESOMAR Code clearly stipulates that the respondent cannot be revealed or be identifiable and the interviews cannot be recorded electronically or by means of other methods if this would expose respondents' anonymity to risk and if it is impossible to obtain their consent for such measures. It is also important to remember that if the customer receives the list of addresses of locations where observations and interviews took place, the results should be presented on the basis of the whole sample and they should not facilitate identification of respective persons or branches.[103]

To sum up, do not take advantage of the good will of the currently observed organisation and do not disturb its work. Do not identify employees in your project report and present aggregated data. If you need to identify someone, ask for the consent of the observed persons. Inform the observed persons in advance about the implementation and make sure to compensate for the waste of time of the observed persons.

Application of MS research in public administration

State institutions use Mystery Clients to control establishments in respect to compliance with the rules of law and to control offices in respect to servicing customers.[104] In the past the method was commissioned for the first time in Poland by the public institution – City Hall in Gdańsk. The decision on the research was taken after a corruption scandal, which featured the local – now ex – director of the Education Department. The President of Gdańsk, Krzysztof Adamowicz, said – "these results will, certainly,

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[102] Authors debate on the number of audits that would permit to draw appropriate conclusions from the audit while not breaching this rule. See: M. Meder, *Zastosowanie metody mystery shopping w bankowości detalicznej...* [*The use of mystery shopping in retail banking*] *op. cit.*; A. Finn, U. Kayandé, *Unmasking a Phantom...op. cit.*, p. 197; Norris P., *Reasons why mystery shopping...op. cit.*, p. 746.

[103] See: A. Wódkowski: „*Mystery Shopping – badanie jakości usług*" [*Mystery Shopping – service quality research*] after: A. Noga-Bogomilski, D. Maison, *Badania marketingowe...* [*Marketing Research...*] *op. cit.*; E. Witucka, *Zawód: tajemniczy klient...*[*Profession -Mystery Client*] *op. cit.*; *Mystery Shopping Studies*, Esomar...*op. cit.*; K. Gow, *How to Have Fun and Make Money...op. cit.*, p. 70; Pentor Research...*op. cit.*; Kostera M., *Antropologia organizacji...* [*Anthropology of organizations...*] *op. cit.*; Mystery Shop Providers Association, http://www.mysteryshop.org/Europe; A. Finn, U. Kayandé, *Unmasking a Phantom...op. cit.*, p. 197.

[104] C. Stucker, *The Mystery Shopper's Manual...op. cit.*, s. 31.

serve some staff decisions. The best will be promotes, and those not meeting the criteria will probably have to say goodbye to their job.[105]" The campaign based on Mystery Shopping was also undertaken by the anti-smoking programme STOP18. As a result it was discovered that in Warsaw three-fourth of shopkeepers are willing to sell cigarettes to young-looking persons – without asking for their ID card. The research resulted in addressing to the court 87 requests for punishing shopkeepers selling cigarettes to minors.[106]

The quality of public administration

The issue of the quality of services provided by the administration is up-to-date and important for several reasons. The most significant of them include:

a)   The fulfilment of a public mission by the public administration,
b)   The need to improve the quality of the office organisation and its functioning,
c)   Meeting the needs of a "collective customer",
d)   Increase in the significance of Public-Private Partnership,
e)   The need to fill in the "gap" in the area of management.

Offices fulfil a public mission, they are organisations of social trust and as such their quality of service as well as other organisational values play a special part.

(...) The quality of service provided by the administration can be identified as a asset, which contributes to the enrichment of the quality of our life and culture. In a sense it is also the level of satisfaction of collective and individual needs.

(...) The service satisfaction proves that the quality management systems function efficiently. Satisfaction is a subjective notion. It is related to the feeling of contentment and pleasure, which accompanies us when we purchase something or use something (which is why we refer to "post-purchase" satisfaction).

(...) Research show that customers in offices expect not only courtesy. Hence other factors are also of value, such as: responsibility, availability, competence, problem solving.

(...) However, customer satisfaction is short-lasting (especially as regards public administration). What amazed as so far, after a while becomes a norm and it is necessary to seek for new ideas. The more we give the more is expected of us.[107]

Summary

Analysis of MS research results leads to a conclusion that very often institutions are too rush to implement this type of research. In order to take part in such a programme it is necessary, first of all, to ensure selection of proper employees, develop quality standards that are in line with the needs of the customers and accepted by the employees. In general, institutions pay to little attention to the selection of proper employees.

Many research lack the stage of identifying the needs of the customers, which causes subsequent misunderstandings. The practical desistance form this stage of trade interview in most of the cases results in negative opinion for the observed.

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[105] K. Michalczak, *Kim jest tajemniczy klient...* [*Who is the Mystery Client*] *op. cit.*
[106] As above.
[107] M. Bugdol, *Zarządzanie jakością w urzędach administracji...* [*Quality management in public administration offices...*] *op. cit.,* s. 25–32.

The knowledge of the standards in each type of institution is slight. The developed quality standards are very often established without consultation with the employees. Only a slight percentage of the employees take note of the final document, on many occasions implementation is not supported by trainings, which precondition success. It is very difficult to win employees that combine knowledge of the soft (manner of conducting the interview, empathy, etc.) and hard (knowledge of the scope, ability to explain the complexity of the service) competences. Thus before we start the monitoring it would be advisable to consider the selection of proper employees and development of standards accepted by the customers and employees.

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Krzysztof Polak, Marzena Żurawicka-Koczan

Semiotic approach in evaluation of public interventions

"While several years ago semiotics was a new tool,
providing a new perspective (...) especially useful for seeking new,
innovative strategies, today it has become a standard
research methodology. One could say that today not using
semiotics becomes risky"

Malcolm Evans

Introduction

When the Swiss Ferdinand de Saussure and the American Charles S. Peirce laid foundations for the theory of signs at the beginning of the 20th century, it was hard to imagine its entry into, and shaping of, various other disciplines. Semiotics transformed linguistics, literature studies, social anthropology, religious studies, film studies, biology and many others. At the same time it fostered the appearance of such new disciplines as structuralism, biosemiotics, zoosemiotics, ecosemiotics, computational semiotics, social semiotics, cultural semiotics, visual semiotics etc. Whenever it appeared, it contributed to the perception of the existing order from a different angle. Semiotics provided new opportunities for understanding and practical use of the new knowledge.

All the branches and uses of semiotics share the same, **key assumption, mainly, that the reality that is the object of study has a signifying character**. The approach to the object of study through the analysis of signs and related meanings – regardless of the area – enables **better identification and understanding of mechanisms and principles of the field of study.**

The present paper refers to the semiotics which has been developed and used in the area of widely understood marketing that goes beyond the strictly commercial use. Today communication, strategic or research techniques developed at commercial grounds are successfully used in the area of political activity. Special guidebooks are published, e.g. "Marketing in the public sector" by Philip Kotler – the famous marketing guru, as one reads in the blurb, or profiled faculties such as "Marketing in public sphere"[108.] Sport marketing, regional and national marketing, marketing of NGOs and marketing and social advertising are among the sub-disciplines of this domain.

Marketing knowledge and techniques are used to solve social problems, animate public life, change social attitudes, create the image of cities, provinces, regions, nations, public institutions, as well as to steer the development of diverse areas of life, science or economy.

Marketing-based semiotic studies, their history and main concepts, which are used in solving of non-commercial problems, will be described in the further part of the text.

Semiotics in evaluation

Whether and how semiotics may be used in evaluation depends on the understanding of the latter and of the selected evaluative approach. The task does not seem simple, as the notion of evaluation

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[108] http://www.inp.uw.edu.pl/?q=studia_podyplomowe/psmwsp

appears in many different senses and contexts. Moreover, as many authors observe, the aims of evaluation are varied, the aspects of the process are many, and the evaluation criteria are different. What is also significant is the fact that the Polish terminology of evaluation has been invaded by the whole Anglo-Saxon tradition. Hence current senses and meanings of evaluation come from different periods they were coined in. According to the history of evaluation[109] proposed by Guba and Lincoln, they originate from four different "generations" of evaluation. The first generation underlines "measurability of effects and means, quantitative description of phenomena",[110] comparability and objectivism of evaluation. Quantitative analysis, statistical data and measurable quantifiers are used in the system.

As Górniak points out, the second generation evaluation "while still quantity-oriented, encompasses nevertheless the description of intervention practice, to make programmes more efficient and use alternative measures".[111] Numbers and data prevail in this system as well, but they are aimed at programme improvement. In this approach, like in the previous one, an evaluator is an external, neutral observer, who uses scientific methods to providethe data which enables measurement of the goal achievement level and consequent programme adjustment.

The third generation, developed from the 1960s, responds to the need for an objective programme evaluation. Evaluators' tasks are not only the description of the programme and the measurement of its objectives, but also the assessment of the way the objectives were set. Evaluators act as active experts and develop recommendations".[112]

In the fourth generation, the qualitative approach prevails, with the emphasis on identification of complex reality aspects. "Various methods may be used in this case, albeit in different proportions for different purposes. The methods belong, yet are not restricted, to the area of quality measurement".[113] Such an approach to evaluation seems the ideal field for the use of semiotics.

Semiotics may be used at evaluation in two ways, as a supplement to the traditional analysis and as an independent analysis which lays foundations for the development of strategy or concepts. Semiotic analysis, as a supplement to "the proper analysis" may be used in following ways:

- as a pilot survey which delineates the research area;
- full semiotic analysis preceding the in-depth research;
- preparation of materials for projecting tests according to the rules of semiotics.
- It may be used "after" for the purposes of:
- full research – justifying or verifying the results of research;
- explaining difference between opinion and behaviour of the analysed population;
- interpreting answers of the analysed population in semiotic categories – especially in the in-depth research.
  Semiotic analysis as an independent analysis enables:
- learning about the analysed population what they are unable to communicate about themselves;
- better understanding of communication mechanisms and communicates (delivered/received/ created);
- understanding of cultural change and identify new trends;
- decreasing research costs in proportion to the knowledge one earns, particularly in marketing research.

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[109] E.G. Guba, Y.S. Lincoln, *Fourth Generation Evaluation,* Newbury Park, 1989.
[110] J. Górniak, *Ewaluacja w cyklu polityk publicznych* [*Evaluation in the cycle of public policies*], [in:] *Ewaluacja funduszy strukturalnych – perspektywa regionalna* [*Evaluation of structural funds – regional perspective*], (Ed.) S. Mazur, University of Economics in Kraków 2007, p. 13.
[111] Ibidem, p. 13.
[112] Ibidem, p. 14.
[113] L. Korporowicz, *Ewaluacja w edukacij* [*Evaluation in education*], Oficyna Naukowa, Warsaw 1997.

While using semiotic analysis, regardless of the way of using it (as a supplement or independent methodology), several key issues should be borne in mind:

- semiotics differs from traditional qualitative analysis;
- qualitative research aims at unearthing "what members of the investigated population mean", while semiotics asks **how come they mean it**;
- **attitudes, beliefs and values originate in the culture that surrounds us; semiotics analyses culture while analysing communication, signs and symbols, deciphers codes which programme the researched groups.**

Semiotic analysis in marketing

When Roland Barthes wrote his *Mythologies* in 1950s, little did he suspect that the critique of the bourgeois culture of the time and the method of semiotic analysis he used would become an impulse to search for uses of semiotics in marketing. Barthes analysed the phenomena of contemporary life and products, e.g. Wine and Milk, Steak and Fries, the New Citroen, Plastic.[114] They were for him the critique of mass culture, an attempt to deconstruct ideologies present in the culture, indicate how they operate and how they create a self-perpetuating world of beliefs and sureties. As Barthes wrote in the Introduction to *Mythologies*: "We find two indices here: on the one hand, ideological critique, including of the language of the so-called mass culture, on the other hand – the first semiological analysis of this very language [...]".[115] Indeed it was the first analysis of this kind, where the semiotic theory has been used for the reflection on the contemporary culture. "The matter of the reflections – according to Barthes – could be diverse (an article in a paper, a photo in a weekly, a film, a performance, an exhibition), and concerning any subject whatsoever: surely it related to the reality around me".[116]

This method of analysis interested one of the advertising agencies of the time, which tried to convince Barthes to work for Renault. At first Barthes, interested by the subject, started to analyse the image of cars, but after a while he refused to cooperate further, as it was against his socialist views concerning the ideology of capitalism.[117] Barthes's work encouraged other agencies to seek marketing solutions in the domain of semiotics – in mid 1970s semiotic analyses were carried out by three French agencies. The semiotics of the type, apart from Barthes's analyses, used theories by Benveniste, Jacobson, Levi-Strauss, Propp, and, last but not least, de Saussure.[118]

De Saussure and the concept of sign

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) is widely known as the "father" of semiotics – at least of its European branch[119]. He called for a "science analysing the presence of signs in social life".[120] While describing the science, he claimed that "it would constitute a part of social psychology, hence, general psychology; we would call it semiology (Gr. semeion – the sign)". The dyadic concept of sign, based upon the tradition originating from Augustine (397), Albertus Magnus and the Scholastics (13th c.), Hobbes (1649) and

[114] R. Barthes, *Mitologie* [*Mythologies*] ,Wydawnictwo KR, Warsaw 2000.
[115] Ibidem, p. 25.
[116] Ibidem, p. 27.
[117] A. Basunti, *Semiotics and Marketing in the United Kingdom: An Explorative Study,* London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), Department of Media and Communications, MSc in Media and Communications, 2004, p. 12.
[118] Ibidem, p. 12.
[119] The American tradition labels thus Charles Sanders Peirce.
[120] F. de Saussure, *Course in general linguistics,* PWN, Warsaw 2002, p. 44.

Locke (1690), was the core of the science proposed by de Saussure.[121] According to de Saussure, the sign consisted of two elements: **signifier (signfiant) and the signified (signifie).** Contemporary interpreters of the concept frequently describe signifier as the sign's form, and the signified as the concept it designates.[122] **The two elements are inseparable – every signifier (form) carries a meaning of a kind, and every signified (concept) has a form.**

This distinction is fundamental for all contemporary semiotic analyses – both academic and marketing-oriented. It determines the approach to phenomena investigated. Let us consider innovativeness as the object of the analysis. The first question a semiotician is going to ask, will be the question about the signs of innovativeness present in the researched area. Depending on the aim of the analysis, this may be the area of business, science, education, technology etc. While using de Saussure's distinction, two analyses should be made: (1) the analysis of **the signifier**, i.e. search for all visual, verbal forms which carry out the idea of innovativeness and (2) of **the signified**, which would indicate how the idea of innovativeness is understood and how many meanings it has.

De Saussure's concept appeared on the basis of the study of language, but it permeated other disciplines in the following years: theories of literature, culture, ethnography, history, theory of art or even biology (biosemiotics) and marketing research.

The French school of semiotics

After 1960s and 1970s decades, a new generation of semioticians appeared in the French semiotics of marketing, extending the scope of research on not only advertisements, but also films, television programmes, press or spatial design.[123] **Jean Marie Floch,** considered today the leading figure of the period, indicated three advantages of semiotic approach in these contexts: **more intelligibility, more pertinence and more diversity.**[124] **More intelligibility** is related to what Floch describes as the *nebulae of meaning*, and concerns the multitude of meanings hidden behind the notion, idea of the advertisement concept. When such a concept is selected as interested for a brand or a product, semiotic analysis provides opportunities for "methodological development of possibilities included in such a promotion concept on the one hand, and for diversification and hierarchy of variables and constants of its contents".[125] Simply speaking, more intelligibility is in Floch's approach getting of the knowledge concerning the spectre of meanings of the advertising concept, ordering of these meanings, understanding their hierarchy and logical order they represent. Often the last phase of such ordering of meanings is the construction of semiotic square[126] which represents such order.

The second opportunity, which Floch identifies as **more pertinence,** also concerns advertising message. Here semiotics helps to determine what is necessary and what is sufficient to define an advertising concept or its use to create originality and specificity of brand communication".[127] Necessity is the choice of elements of an advertising message which makes it sufficiently distinctive and specific for the brand. The choice of such forms, colours, typographies, shapes which makes the product packing, design or logo mean what has been planned.

Third opportunity specified as more diversity touches upon the most significant problem, which is the most difficult one at the same time, meaning making the product distinctive on the market

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[121] D. Chandler, *Semiotics. The Basis,* Routlege, London 2007, p. 14.
[122] 15 Ibidem, p. 14.
[123] A. Basunti, *Semiotics and Marketing...*, p. 12.
[124] J.M. Floch, *Semiotics, marketing and communication. Beneath the signs, the strategies,* Palgrave, New York 2001, p. 6–12.
[125] Ibidem, p. 7.
[126] The Greimas's semiotic square. See J.M. Floch, *Semiotics, marketing...*, op.cit.
[127] Ibidem, p. 8

of products and brands. The use of semiotics to make the product distinctive is, according to Floch, the most obvious of its uses, as the essence of the discipline and, most of all, the notion of meaning is based upon the idea of difference which makes the meaning.[128]

Cultural studies and British semiotics

The British way of semiotic thinking and semiotics-based marketing developed in parallel to the French school. In mid 1980s Valentine and Alexander established a research company specialising in semiotic analyses for the marketing needs. Their method was influenced, apart from Barthes, Levi-Strauss or de Saussure, by British cultural studies. Authors also highlighted the distinctness of their school from the French school of semiotics. Virginia Valentine recalls the period in the following way: "[...] we took much from the tradition of cultural studies (the Birmingham Centre) of the 1970s and 1980s. We have used Raymond Williams's idea of residual, dominant and emergent codes [...] The key idea of Stuart Hall about acceptance, rejection and negotiation [of a communicate – translator's note]. I think the French do not have all of the above".[129]

Contrarily to the French, text-centred approach, the British authors focused primarily on culture and its influence on shaping of the meanings represented in consumers' attitudes and behaviours. "From this perspective, semiotics helps discover deep, often unconscious, symbolic meanings and mythologies behind consumer practices".[130]

As Hall has pointed out, **culture is one of the most difficult concepts present in social sciences.[131]** Various definitions of culture emphasize its different aspects, depending on their social, psychological, anthropological, ethnological origins. Culture has often been associated with diverse forms of artistic activities: music, film, graphic arts, literature. Such a definition of culture is more common today in everyday use than in social sciences, which understand it more like the way people, social groups, nations live. This –al Hall observes – is closer to the anthropological definition of culture. **The object of cultural studies is neither culture as forms of artistic activities nor "the process of aesthetic, intellectual and spiritual development" or the lifestyle, but as "texts and practice of everyday life".**[132]

The definition of culture in the cultural studies was influenced by the cultural turn in social science, which made meaning a key determinant of culture. **Culture is hence regarded as production of meaning by community members.** Hall describes the process in a following way: "defining two people as belonging to the same culture means that they interpret the world in a similar way and express themselves in a similar way".[133] Thus culture concerns "shared social meanings, i.e. various meaning-making practices".[134]

Cultural studies focus in particular on the role of the language in creating "shared social meanings". Here attention should be paid to the wider understanding of the notion of the "language" – it goes beyond what is written and said. Common language is not only the ability to communicate in Polish or English, but the possibility of understanding visual, verbal, non-verbal communicates, gestures, or fashion. Community members must, apart from the ability to interpret in a similar way the different manifestations of a common language, possess the ability to express their feelings, ideas, and beliefs through the different languages.

[128] F. de Saussure, *Kurs językoznawstwa ogólnego* [*Course in General Linguistics*], PWN, Warsaw 2002, p. 141.

[129] A. Basunti, *Semiotics and Marketing...*, op.cit, p. 26.

[130] Ibidem, p. 35.

[131] S. Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices,* Sage Publications, London 1997, p. 2

[132] J. Storey, *Studia kulturowe i badanie kultury popularnej. Teorie i metody* [*Cultural theory and popular culture*], Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2003, p. 22.

[133] S. Hall, *Representation...*, op.cit., p. 4.

[134] Ch. Barker, *Studia kulturowe. Teoria i praktyka* [*Cultural studies: theory and practice*], Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2005, p. 8.

Language or languages thus understood are not a simple reflection of the objective reality, though. As Hall observes, "no straightforward relation exists of mirroring, imitation or direct equivalence between the language and the real world. The world is not reflected in the language. Language is not a mirror. Meaning is made within the language through different representation systems, which we call languages for convenience".[135] It means that the social world we live in is a construct, created in the process of "production and distribution of meaning". The world is represented by different elements that constitute languages. Spoken language uses sounds, written language – letters of alphabet, body language – gestures, fashion language – clothes – all these elements "construct and carry meaning".[136] Meaningless themselves, they are portents of meaning; they act as symbols which represent social senses, ideas, concepts, values.

Often used notion of "representation" is one of the key notions of cultural studies. In the shortened definition, representation is "a process, during which members of a culture use language (widely defined as the system of signs) to produce meaning".[137] The meaning produced in the process are subject to distribution, i.e. they are spread in the culture through different representation systems in press, television, films, literature, music. Distribution makes the community members assimilate meaning believing them to be theirs –thus they become the members of the same culture. Thus the meanings are multiplied and reproduced in diverse cultural texts through media.

The role of texts in semiotic analysis

Here we approach the essential issue for cultural studies and semiotics, i.e., the special role of cultural texts in production and distribution of meaning. Hence it is not difficult to understand the interest of the researchers in the field in media: film, television, press, advertisement, and, lately, Internet. The consequences are visible in the approach to research on culture: **it is cultural texts (media) and not members of a community that become the object of research.** Textuall analysis helps unearth the meaning present within, investigate the relations between different meanings, understand ways of production of meanings. Social attitudes and individual behaviour, beliefs, ideas, ways of acting, values of community members are the effect of influence of meaning and its representation in the culture.

With regard to such conclusions, analysis of meaning is therefore one of the basic aspects of studies on culture. Commercial British research is based upon the same premises, at the same time **regarding culture as an important vehicle for various aspects of social life and human activity, including the areas of market, consumption, business, science, medicine etc.**

To conclude, the approach to culture present in the British school of marketing semiotics could be summed up in the following manner:

1. **Whether we want it or not, we all are members of a culture.** We are not fully aware of the influence of culture on our behaviour and attitude.
2. **Culture determines the way we act, our everyday practices, values, attitudes, beliefs.** It concerns all areas of life: art, business, leisure time, science, family life etc.
3. **Culture** also **shows us how to interpret contents** that reach us as diverse cultural texts and determines how we may express ourselves, while creating such texts.
4. **Understanding and studying culture is analysing meaning and its representation present in texts of culture (media),** not asking respondents.

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[135] S. Hall, *Representation...,* op.cit., p. 28.
[136] Ibidem, p. 5.
[137] Ibidem, p. 61.

Codes and cultural change

Malcolm Evans, while pointing to the advantages of semiotic approach to marketing, emphasizes "cultural and intercultural understanding of the market", which makes it possible to place brand communication in the context of a given culture.[138] Thus the most relevant ways of representation and expression of certain ideas – verbal, visual, acoustic forms of expression known as codes.

Codes are often defined as "a form of cultural abbreviation; visual, verbal, acoustic or mixed typical forms of discursive expression (and of the culture the discourse represents) at a given moment in its [the discourse's – translator's note] history".[139] Evans describes **a code as a certain open set of signifiers,** which refer to one shared meaning. As an example of a commonly used code in beer production, he lists a chain of signifiers which form the code of *refreshment*. These are: a breaking sea wave, the sound of a bottle opening, amber liquid with bubbles, condensation drops, images of thirst – dried land, hot sun, intense physical activity, energy burst[140] Codes are hence certain conventions which we treat as obvious and unquestionable forms of behaviour, expression, representation and understanding of things and of the world. Such definition of a code appears as well in the area of cultural studies. Stuart Hall mentions "conceptual maps, shared language systems and codes, which govern translation between the languages. The codes determine the relation between concepts and signs".[141]

A characteristic feature of the British approach to semiotics is the concept of residual, dominant and emerging codes (figure 1), inspired by the idea of Raymond Williams, one of the key figures of the British cultural studies. Williams points to the fact, that the process of cultural change would be described in various eras. Accounts are written of transition from feudal to bourgeois culture, or about the Enlightenment being replaced by Romanticism. While describing a period, other phenomena and trends which could help understand the origins and process of cultural change, are often omitted. Also the belief that culture of each period is homogenous and coherent, which is an evidently reductive and hinders understanding of processes taking place within a culture at any moment, contributes to the description of a period. According to Williams, each period can be described in a way that "reflects the dynamics of internal relation of the ongoing process".[142] Processes taking part within any period may be characterised as a relationship between the dominant, the residual and the emerging.
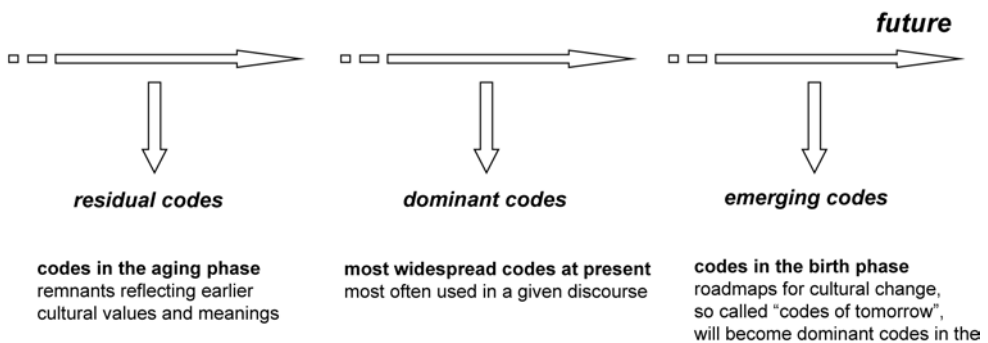

Fig. 1. Emerging/dominant/residual codes

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[138] M. Evans, M. Harvey, *Decoding competitive propositions: a semiotic alternative to traditional market research*, [in:] "International Journal of Market Research", 2001, Vol. 43 Quarter 2, p. 174.

[139] M. Alexander, *Codes and Contexts: Practical Semiotics for the Qualitative Researcher,* Market Research Society Conference 2000.

[140] M. Evans, M. Harvey, *Decoding...*, op.cit., p. 176.

[141] S. Hall, *Representation...*, op.cit., p. 21.

[142] R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature,* Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 121.

Residual phenomena in a culture of a period are "dated, but still active in cultural process, not only as an element of the past, but as an active element of the present".[143] These are experiences, values, meanings, which represent attitudes opposing the dominant culture. They used to play a key role in cultural processes, as driving forces of culture, but in time lost their significance and ceased to fit with the dominant culture.

Emerging phenomena on the other hand, are new meanings and values, new practices, relations and their constantly appearing variants.[144] They are distanced from culture, but at the same time they forecast possible directions of cultural change.

These three types of codes: residual, dominant and emerging determine how forms of expression, conventions, ideas and concept change in culture and communication. Residual codes are "the remains of earlier cultural sets of values and conventions"[145]. They are still present in culture, albeit not as powerful as they used to be, they are gradually expiring, become less significant, or they are replaced by newer codes. **Dominant codes are the most popular and common conventions of the present.** These represent meanings and ways of expression which influence the most different areas of culture. Emerging codes are the new, appearing, not yet determined forms. They announce changes in the way of expression, but also in the area of meanings, ideas, concepts present in culture. According to Alexander, they are "roadmaps to the future, which have just appeared on the horizon of culture".[146]

The method of working with codes has become popular over the last few years in semiotic analyses for marketing and has become one of the prevailing paradigms in the area. As it has been pointed out by Evans, "this way of code mapping may be used in any area of brand communication and in popular culture in any country – from megatrends on beliefs, gender etc. to micro details of evolving codes (or unwritten rules) of advertising in a specific category".[147]

Another advantage of semiotic approach in marketing, mentioned by Evans, is related to understanding of communication codes of an investigated product category and determining the codes of a brand and its competition and their effects. Comparing the knowledge with the analysis of culture enables to set the direction for the brand. Such a comparison of communication codes with culture has other than commercial uses. Communication of European Fund strategies, economic strategies campaigns or social campaigns, such as:

- *promotion campaign* of the National Cohesion Strategy;
- the "European Social Fund, Man – the Best Investment" *campaign (the European Social Fund);*
- the Ministry of Regional Development's campaign *"the EU Prescription for Health Service"* (the Human Capital Operational Programme, Priority XII of the Operational Programme Infrastructure and Environment, the Operational Programme Innovative Economy and 16 regional programmes);
- *lifelong learning* campaign – employee training – *"training – it's worth it!"* Human Capital Operational Programme);
- the regional campaign *["the Beautiful East"]*;
- campaigns of cities *["Fall in love in Warsaw", "When investing – Gdynia", "Gdańsk – the sea of opportunities"]* etc.;
- *social campaigns, e.g.* „KorupcJa. Nie musisz dawać, nie musisz brać w tym udziału"; „Piłeś? Nie jedź!"; „Sprawni zawodowo" [„Corruptlon. You don't have to give, you don't have to take part", „Have you drunk? Don't drive!", „Professionally able"] etc.

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[143] Ibidem, p. 122.
[144] Ibidem, p. 123.
[145] M. Alexander, *Codes...*, op.cit.
[146] Ibidem.
[147] M. Anderson, M. Evans, *Foresight Semiotics*, ESOMAR World Research Paper, 2006, p. 4.

also relates to a kind of product, to which we want to encourage the recipients. **Understanding, whether the used** communication codes **belong to the wider culture, or not, may be crucial for determining** the effect of the communicate.

Third advantage pointed out by Evans **concerns consumer insights.** While traditional qualitative research reveals norms, ideas and present consumer attitudes, **semiotics enables "a more visionary perspective" and revealing possible future tendencies**.[148] It is worth pointing out that British semioticians often oppose their methodology to traditional qualitative analyses. Virginia Valentine comments the fact in a following manner: "in order to understand what really happens on the market, a semiotician looks over the heads of consumers at the cultural context, which surrounds and informs them, in order to weight factors that matter there [...] This is the main difference between our, semiotic approach and other types of marketing research. While marketing researcher's survey consumers, we survey communication".[149]

Semiotics – the secret weapon[150]

When F. de Saussure and Ch. S. Peirce laid foundations for the study of signs, nobody suspected the influence it would exert on many disciplines. **Not only did "the semiotic mutation" transform a range of disciplines, but also, starting from the 1980s, it changed the face of marketing, market and social research.** Undoubtedly, wherever used, it brought a unique contextual knowledge providing for new opportunities of understanding and practical use.

As demonstrated in the brief outline above, researchers in various fields soon realised that **semiotics may constitute a perfect supplement or even an interesting alternative to traditional research,** also, in terms of financing. To the semioticians' surprise, the effectiveness of their method turned out to be a vaccine against the "epidemic of semiotics" in research. The clients who discovered its advantages were reluctant to advertise what constituted a significant part of their competitive advantage. On the other hand, semioticians had to accept the position of *éminence grise*, keeping details of their work confidential, for the sake and at the request of their clients, such as Coca Cola, Procter & Gamble, Unilever, Nokia, American Express, Visa, the British Army, the British Department of Health, the British Council, global organizations, such as UNICEF.

Litter and semiotics – an example of semiotic analysis

The strength of semiotic analysis lies, apart from an inquisitive diagnosis of the issue and its mechanism, in the proposition of solution it provides. Such was the case of one of the British organisations related to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which was requested to intervene against littering and to promote the idea of tidy environment. Littering by teenagers is one of concerns of the organisation "Keep Britain Tidy". In 2002, the organisation decided to check the effects of campaigns in teenage school environment: posters, leaflets, lectures on littering. Traditional qualitative research was planned: face-to face interviews, which were to show how teenagers' attitude toward littering changed on the one hand, and help create new campaigns, on the other.

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[148] M. Evans, M. Harvey, *Decoding...*, op.cit., p. 174.
[149] A. Basunti, *Semiotics and Marketing...*, op.cit, p. 36.
[150] Compare K. Polak, *Semiotyka – uzdrawiająca epidemia* [*Semiotics – an epidemic that heals*]; http://www.semiotyka.pl/

As it was concluded in the Report, the results were "horrifying".[151] The organisation's activities had little to no influence on teenagers' behaviours. Although the research provided quite an interesting classification of "littering behaviours", situations and teenagers' attitudes toward littering, it was particularly difficult to draw conclusions on how to change their attitudes in the future. It became clear, that teenagers' attitudes on littering cannot be explained by talks, face-to-face or group interviews, focuses or other qualitative, survey-based methods. The need for a wider cultural context which shapes teenagers' attitudes and behaviours toward littering has become apparent. Methods were sought to explore the former and change the latter. In 2004, the organisation commissioned research to the British company specialising in semiotic analyses, Greg Rowland Semiotics.

- The commission consisted of following tasks:[152]
- The analysis of all past youth-oriented, anti-litter campaigns.
- The analysis of campaigns against other forms of antisocial behaviour.
- Determining the cultural factors which encourage teenagers to litter.
- Semiotic review of qualitative research on littering.
- Exploring popular culture with respect to antisocial behaviour.
- Identification of key codes and cultural leitmotivs influencing behaviour of 13–16 year olds.
- Identification of the right style and tone of communication with 13–16 year olds.
- Identification of visual, linguistic and other forms significant for anti-litter campaigns.

Drawing conclusions from the above analyses and proposing potential communication directions, which would be the most convincing for the youth.

Wide contextual analysis of the teenager culture indicated that litter and littering had a range of positive connotations: for instance, of a small, safe rebellion with no serious consequences, such as getting arrested. The act of littering makes teenagers consumers, i.e. fully grown society members. Littering is also a chaos of a kind, lack of order, which is one of the key ideas in the postmodern youth culture.

Moreover, the word "litter" itself is absent from the youth culture – it functions as an archaism from the world of adults, a stranger in the teenage reality.

Further analyses helped draw conclusions concerning general rules of the youth culture, worth taking into consideration while communicating with teenagers. The "I" is for instance more important to teenagers than consequences of their actions; hence it is pointless to speak about consequences of littering. Teenagers are driven by extreme emotions, they live here and now, and are not interested in what happens tomorrow, or in 50 years' time – appealing to reason is also pointless. Long-term actions and campaigns will not prove effective either, due to their expecting immediate results and effects. In their culture there is a pressure to be as everyone else and, at the same time, to feel distinctive, other, alienated even, which constitutes an interesting paradox possible to implement in communication.

These are few examples of the observations, on the basis of which simple communication advice were formulated, such as:

- better to mince words then communicate to the point,
- use imaginative metaphors instead of facts, as the latter are associated with adults' persuasion,
- do not try to be modern and pretend to speak their language, it never works,
- create a parallel world consistent with promoted values,
- make room for the perverse and the stupid, celebrate rubbish [no pun intended – translator's note],
- break the rules,
- create open texts which enable teenagers to play with meaning.[153]

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[151] S. Nelson, *I'm just a teenage dirt bag, baby!,* Environmental Campaigns, 2004, p. 6.
[152] From the report made available by Greg Rowland Semiotics.
[153] Ibidem, p. 28.

Finally, semiotic analysis enabled to identify a set of key teenager notions related to litter and littering, which should be the focus of communication. The anti-litter campaign should primarily question or ridicule the belief that dirt and uncleanliness are attractive. This aspect exposed in the youth culture makes, for instance, dirty, shabby walls, forbidden sex, drugs, dirty business, more attractive than physical and symbolic cleanliness. Thus littering becomes a symbol of rebellion and objection to the order of things. Not only is the act of littering a rebellion against the rules in force, but also against the world of adults and their persuasive methods of education and upbringing.

A dumpster should be an important element of future campaigns. In the teenager culture, it is a "devil's place" – dirty, disgusting and always full, a place no one cares about and always too far away to throw litter. A dumpster is also an antithesis of the body, of all teenagers deem important in their bodies. Finally, a dumpster is "the black hole", inspiring fear and awe.

Semiotic analyses and conclusions they offer, as well as communication directives constituted a significant basis for the development of strategies and future communication campaigns. The understanding of a wide cultural context enabled better adaptation of anti-litter activity and communication to the teenager culture and identification of key issues related to litter.

Conclusion

Semiotic analysis is one of many analyses performed at the evaluation process, yet the use of the idea of a sign, codes and other semiotic tools in order to better understand social and cultural context should provide better cognitive perspective and, what matters most, help implement the knowledge one received to create better, more controlled conditions for the intervention's resulting in social change.

We are convinced that semiotics may be particularly useful in two contexts – ex-*post* and *ex-ante* evaluation**. In the former case, semiotics** may help identify origins of a success or a defeat of an intervention programme, determine cultural barriers which hindered its effective implementation, or identify cultural origins of success so that they could be purposefully applied to other activities and programme continuation. **Such research, apart from investigating the cultural context, should focus on the analysis of the hitherto undertaken activities, their character, style, compliance with culture, but, most of all, it should focus on the analysis of communication materials of the intervention: leaflets, posters, television or radio broadcasts.**

The use of semiotics in *ex-ante* evaluation seems much more interesting. "It is assumed that conclusions from that type of evaluation should be appended to the designed programmed at the stage of taking decision of its launching".[154] In ex-ante evaluation, semiotic analysis may be of use in determining cultural problems at the basis of the planned intervention, setting project/programme objectives and communication framework for proper programme implementation. Such an analysis should focus above all on identifying key issues and cultural themes for the intervention, and then determine means of communication, signs, codes, metaphors, symbols that should be used to foster social change.

To conclude, it should be pointed out, that from the cultural perspective, not all interventions may bring the expected results. Culture is autonomous to some extent, and creates a certain network of links and relations. **Not all changes are feasible in a given cultural context** – they depend on the specific cultural configuration. Interventions which were successful in Western Europe may not be equally successful in Polish reality. Semiotics may be useful in this context. This is one of the most important, and the final reason to use semiotic analysis.

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[154] B. Turowski, M. Zawicki, *Funkcje, etapy, metody i narzędzia ewaluacji* [*Functions, stages, methods and tools of evaluation*], [in:] *Ewaluacja funduszy strukturalnych – perspektywa regionalna* [*Evaluation of structural funds – regional perspective*], (Ed.) S. Mazur, University of Economics in Kraków 2007, p. 43.

Although semiotics is already 100 years old, these are its first steps in the area of public intervention management and evaluation. Protean character, dynamics of the contemporary world, and new challenges for public institutions, force managers of the public sector to seek new solutions. **Whether semiotics becomes a secret, elitist weapon, or a new, purposefully used strategy of institutions in struggling for their clients, beneficiaries, funds, will be verified, as always, by...the future.**

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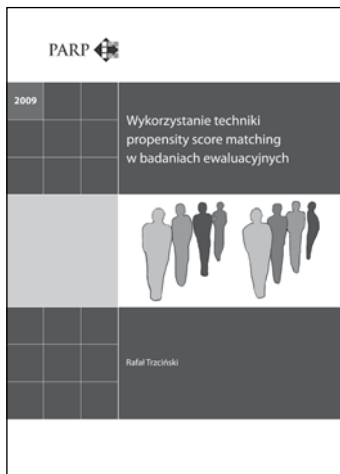
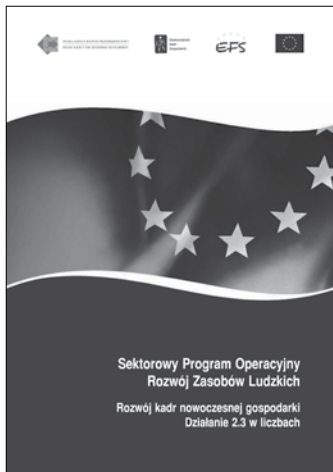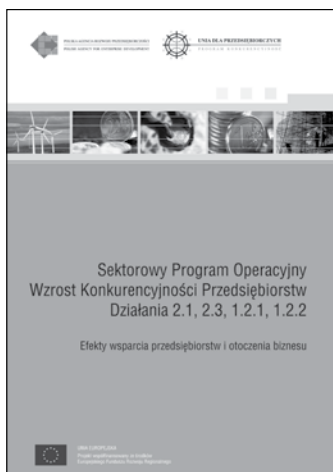**Under the EVALUATION series the following volumes were published so far:**

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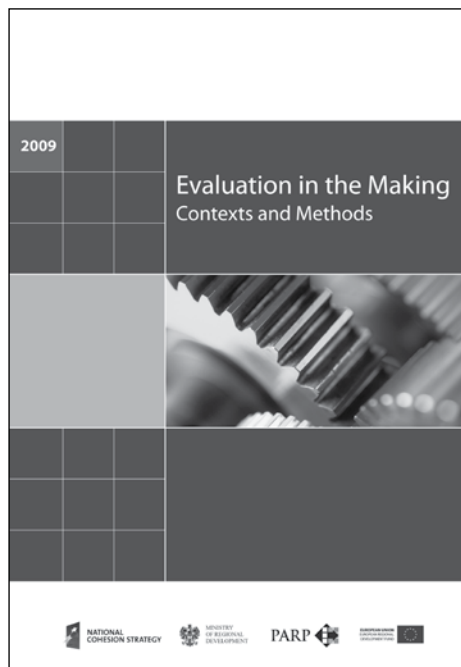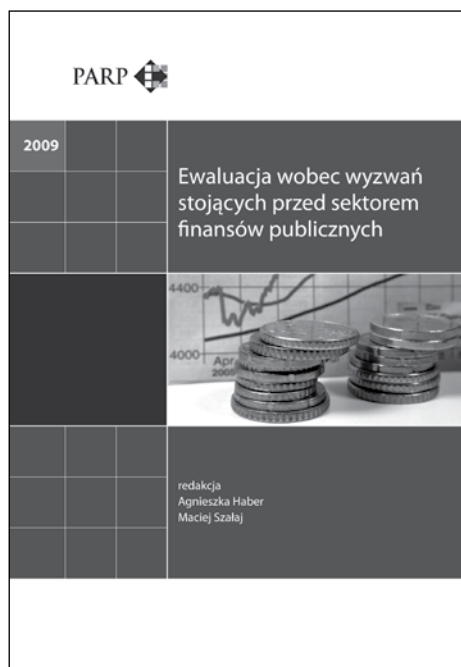
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