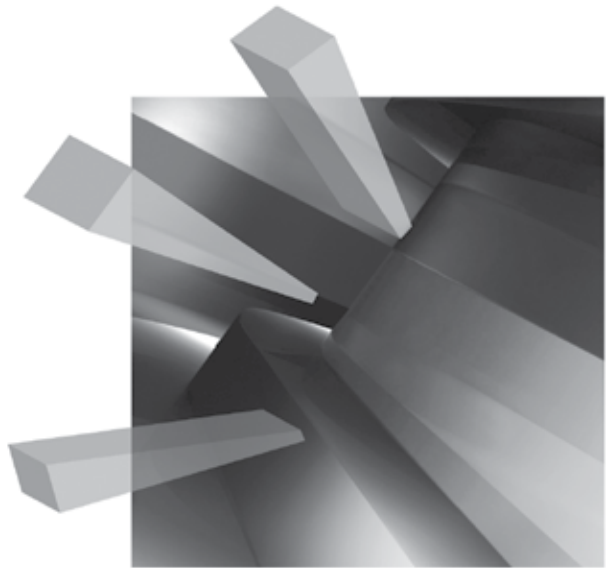


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Redakcja wydawnicza: Joanna Świrska-Korłub
Redakcja techniczna i korekta: Barbara Łopusiewicz
Łamanie: Adam Dębski
Projekt okładki: Beata Dębska

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ul. Komandorska 118/120, 53-345 Wrocław
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Piotr Rogala

Wrocław University of Economics
e-mail: piotr.rogala@ue.wroc.pl

Sławomir Wawak

Cracow University of Economics
e-mail: wawaks@uek.krakow.pl

**DEDICATED STANDARDS FOR QUALITY
MANAGEMENT IN TRAINING COMPANIES***

**STANDARDY ZARZĄDZANIA JAKOŚCIĄ
W FIRMACH SZKOLENIOWYCH**

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Summary: The aim of the paper is to present and compare available standards describing requirements for quality management in training companies. Two standards were taken into consideration: international standard ISO 29990 and the Malopolska Standards for Education and Training Services (MSUES) which has been developed by the Regional Labour Office in Cracow (Poland). Studies of this type of standards are very scarce in the literature. Most of the publications about training concern the quality of training from the view of a customer, effectiveness of training methods or design of training activities, but not the quality management in training company. The study proves that this kind of standard can have a positive impact on the market of training services. The study also identifies the key similarities and differences among the analysed standards.

Keywords: training companies, ISO 29990, MSUES, quality management.

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie i porównanie standardów zawierających wymagania dotyczące zarządzania jakością w firmach szkoleniowych. Analizę objęte zostały dwa dokumenty – międzynarodowa norma ISO 29990 oraz Małopolskie Standardy Usług Edukacyjno-Szkoleniowych (MSUES), opracowane przez Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Krakowie (Polska). Dotychczas niewiele miejsca poświęcono tej problematyce w literaturze przedmiotu. Większość publikacji z tego zakresu koncentruje się na jakości szkolenia rozpatrywanej z punktu widzenia klienta, efektywności metod szkoleniowych oraz projektowania działań szkoleniowych, ale nie na zarządzaniu jakością w firmie szkoleniowej. W wyniku przeprowadzonej analizy zidentyfikowano kluczowe podobieństwa oraz różnice

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wstępujące między oboma standardami i wykazano, że mogą one mieć pozytywny wpływ na rynek usług szkoleniowych.

Słowa kluczowe: firmy szkoleniowe, ISO 29990, MSUES, zarządzanie jakością.

1. Introductory remarks

There are three main contexts of research work regarding training. Psychologists explore the impact of training on human behaviour and motivation. Economists are interested in relations with raising employee's productivity. Teachers analyse effectiveness of teaching methods. The examples of those areas of research can be: the analysis of factors that impact quality of training [Galloway, Ho 1996], research on effectiveness of training [Clegg, Rees, Titchen 2010], instructional design [Branch 2009; *Instructional-design...* 2012; Smith, Ragan 2005], methods of increasing quality of training [Byrnes, Baxter 2012; Wood, Dickinson 2011; Werner, Weckenmann 2009]. However, problems of managing educational institutions rarely become a subject of research. Most of them focus on schools and universities, ignoring a large market of training companies [Sakthivel, Raju 2006; Arif, Ilyas 2011]. While schools and universities provide knowledge to students, it is the training firms that are usually responsible of raising the competence of employees of companies and government offices. It is worth noticing that despite the existence of a huge number of publications on training, there are almost no studies related to the way how to manage a training company successfully.

Training market in Poland is not homogeneous. Institutions try to offer training tailored to the identified needs of enterprises. The common areas of training are:

- mandatory training, e.g. periodic health and safety training,
- training related to competence in which licences are required, e.g. forklift operator,
- specialized training which requires accreditation, e.g. IT administrator, project manager, language training,
- training related to obtaining skills, e.g. operating accounting software, selected management methods, training for coaches,
- training related to obtaining knowledge, e.g. legislation changes,
- dedicated training related to solving specific problems reported by the companies, usually together with advisory activities.

It should be emphasized that most of the training activities are focused on the acquisition of knowledge, specific competences and attitudes by their participants. This offer is therefore complementary to curricula of schools and universities focused largely on transfer of knowledge.

Limited range of skills possessed by graduates of colleges and universities is one of the reasons why companies attempt to raise competences of new employees even before sending them to work. Training companies can better make up for the

shortcomings, because they can quickly respond to business needs, adapt curricula to demand and pursue separate orders for small groups of participants.

More experienced workers participate in training primarily in order to raise productivity on their stands or because of promotion. An additional goal is to increase the level of motivation of employees, their involvement or rewarding. In this case, organizations sometimes allow employees to choose training not related to their workplace. It should be emphasized that in addition to performance improvement, training can have a significant positive impact on the behaviour of employees in an organization [Punia, Saharan 2011, p. 240].

Research shows that training is not the only factor affecting the performance of an employee. Age and experience are important too. The most important factor is, however, quality of management – the way managers establish an organization, structure and processes. Therefore, in many cases, training does not solve performance problems. It only makes sense if the processes in a company have the potential to exceed the current performance or, when a training is the beginning to the reorganization of these processes [Devaraj, Babu 2004, p. 63].

Employee training can have a significant positive impact on the functioning of an organization. However, the organization must be prepared to use new knowledge and competence. Assuming the existence of this readiness, it is clear that the quality of training is influenced by: the training content, methods and conditions of training, trainer's skills and compliance with the requirements of law. The achievement of a desired level of these factors is a result of implementation of certain strategy, structure and processes in the training company.

In the last 20 years standards describing management systems became popular among enterprises [ISO Survey 2011]. The most popular of them is ISO 9001:2008. Over 1 million certificates of quality management system has been issued. However, the generality of requirements of the ISO 9001:2008 standard limits its usefulness for training companies. In recent years, though, two new standards describing training activity have been developed. The aim of the paper is to present and compare two standards describing requirements for quality management in training companies.

Standards for training institutions are new to the market. There are few organizations that have implemented them. Training companies, consultant and certification organizations collect only experience. There were no scientific studies of the effects of the implementation of these standards by the end of 2014.

2. Polish training market

Polish training market is estimated to be worth around 4 billion PLN with up to 6000 firms operating in the area [Jaworska 2012]. The market is determined by two crucial factors. First of them is the flow of the EU funds to Poland. The European Union allotted 11 billion euro for training activities in Poland in the past few years. It resulted in a sudden increase of the number of training firms in the years 2007-2008.

However, the negative outcome of the facilitated access to the donations was a noticeable decrease of the trainings' quality [Popławski 2014, p. 37]. Moreover, for many firms, the period between finishing one project and starting another was the time of financial problems.

Those problems were overlapped by the results of the second factor, which was the economic crisis. It made many firms cut the budget for training. More than 70% of Polish firms are estimated to have followed the pattern in 2010 [Rosłon 2013, p. 68]. The decline in demand for training services complicated the situation of the training firms.

Currently a lot of companies operate on the Polish training market, but they are mostly very small with limited factual potential. Firms find it difficult to provide a satisfactory level of their services as the market still prefers reducing expenses at the cost of quality [Wawer 2012, p. 448].

Facing more and more serious financial problems and market competition, the training firms try to find opportunities to reinforce their position. The research has shown that the most popular actions in the area were [End of Financial... 2014, p. 43]:

- looking for new clients (42.8%),
- including new training topics to their offer (42.3%),
- looking for new cooperation partners (36.3%),
- introducing modern teaching techniques in their trainings e.g. e-learning (27.9%),
- changing the line of business (14.6%),
- lowering the prices of training services (8.5%).

Worth noticing is the fact that fewer than 5% of the respondents support a continuous increase of the services quality and aiming at receiving proper certificate, while the experts unanimously point out that in the nearest future the Polish training market will experience significant changes, and the most successful firms will be those which will provide the highest level of the services [End of Financial... 2014, p. 43].

3. ISO 29990:2010: standard

The ISO 29990:2010 “Learning services for non-formal¹ education and training – Basic requirements for service providers” is a source of a unified standard for learning service providers, including corporations, vocational institutions, and life-long learning centres, around the globe. The standard has been developed by technical committee ISO/TC 232 Learning services for non-formal education and training of International Organization for Standardization (ISO) [International Organization... 2015]. The aim of the committee is to deliver the standardization of requirements for learning services providing outside formal education, including

¹ According to the ISO 29990:2010 non-formal education means organized educational activity outside established recognized formal systems of elementary, secondary or higher education (e.g. vocational training and life-long learning).

vocational and professional education and training. Many countries, by their representatives, contributed to the success of ISO 29990:2010 standard preparation, including the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, Ireland, Poland, Australia, Japan, Russia, Kenya and Austria [Heene, Jodkowska 2014]. Apart from this standard, the committee also released ISO 29991:2014 standard “Language learning services outside formal education – Requirements”. Currently, the efforts of the committee are put into preparing ISO 19366 standard “Learning services outside formal education – Requirements” or generic service standard – “Learning services outside formal education”. 17 national representatives take part in the committee’s project ISO/TC 232, and 16 another representatives, including Polish, are given the status of observers [International Organization... 2015].

ISO 29990:2010 consists of four chapters, but the requirements for training companies are included only in chapters 3 and 4 (table 1).

Table 1. ISO 29990:2010: requirements

Chapter	Requirements/subsections
Foreword Introduction 1. Scope 2. Terms and definitions	–
3. Learning services	3.1. Determining learning needs 3.2. Design of the learning services 3.3. Provision of the learning services 3.4. Monitoring the delivery of the learning services 3.5. Evaluation carried out by learning service providers
4. Management of the learning service provider	4.1. General management requirements 4.2. Strategy and business management 4.3. Management review 4.4. Preventive actions and corrective actions 4.5. Financial management and risk management 4.6. Human resources management 4.7. Communication management (internal/external) 4.8. Allocation of resources 4.9. Internal audits 4.10. Feedback from interested parties
Annexes	A. Business plan content B. Information for management system reviews C. Preventive actions and corrective actions D. Examples of core competencies for learning service providers E. Correspondence between ISO 29990:2010 and ISO 9001:2008

Source: [ISO 29990:2010].

Some of the subsections are additionally divided into parts, e.g. chapter 4.6. Human resources management was split into: 4.6.1. Competencies of the LSP’s staff and associates and 4.6.2. Evaluation of LSP competencies, performance management, and professional.

The standard uses the term *learning services* rather than *training* in order to encourage a focus on the learner and the results of the process, and to emphasize the full range of options available for delivering learning services.

ISO 29990:2010 standard can be used to certify training companies. However, the popularity of the solution has been very poor so far. In 2014 around 30 companies were certified with ISO 29990:2010. They were mostly organizations from Germany and Japan [*World Register...* 2015].

It is worth mentioning that earlier ISO developed the other standard on training. ISO 10015:1999 serves as a guideline to education and training within organizations, and it ensures that employees within the organization are well-trained and competent to meet the organization's commitment to supply products of required quality [*ISO 10015...* 1999]. However, this document applies only, usually as an extension to ISO 9001, to organizations that buy external training services.

4. Malopolska Standards for Education and Training

Regional Labour Office in Cracow developed its own standard for training services. It was designed to facilitate the regulation of the market of training co-financed by EU funds. In future it may help to regulate the entire market of training in Poland. The work on the Malopolska Standards for Education and Training Services (MSUES) was taken in 2010. The standard was developed based on the experience of west European countries and in consultation with leading training companies in Malopolska. The first version was published in 2012 (table 2). In contrast to ISO standards, MSUES are available for free on the Internet along with a comprehensive implementation guide [*Przewodnik...* 2012]. The pilot implementation project started in 2013. Quality Assurance Centre in Regional Labour Office in Cracow coordinated the implementation of MSUES in 150 training companies in Poland.

Every requirement contains one or more controls, which describe how training company should act. The controls provide detailed demands, e.g. in case of coaches experience: number of hours of training and scope of completed teaching course. There are two types of controls – mandatory and optional. The first type is required during certification audit, while the second – only recommended in accordance with the business model.

Certification process is supervised by Regional Labour Office in Cracow (RLO) and consists of four steps: self-assessment, consultation, audit and monitoring. Every organization starts with self-assessment of their management system based on guidelines for MSUES implementation. Next, the organization should contact with Regional Labour Office in order to consult changes necessary to achieve compliance. Audit is carried out by an independent body, which has accreditation of RLO. Certificates are issued by RLO for three years, during which the organization is monitored.

Table 2. MSUES requirements

Chapter	Requirements
I. Standards for educational and training service	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Objectives and scope of the courses are tailored to the needs of participants. 2. The curricula are described in the language of learning effects. 3. Training programs are based on current, reliable knowledge and implemented in the form appropriate to the objectives. 4. The training institution acts in support of consolidation of learning outcomes. 5. Training institution systematically examines the results of training activities.
II. Standards for staff competences and development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Training institution has competent staff responsible for substantive supervision of training activities. 7. Theoretical and practical knowledge of the training staff is suitable to a range of training and educational purposes. 8. Staff training has social and methodological competences related to the education of adults. 9. Training staff participates in development activities and updates own competences. 10. Training staff contributes to the dissemination of knowledge and exchange of good practices related to lifelong learning (optional).
III. Standards for infrastructure, organization and customer service	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Training institution provides participants with reliable service and efficient organization of the training. 12. The institution provides training in conditions that ensure the comfort of participants and mental health at work. 13. The institution plans training time in a manner that promotes comfort and health of participants mental work. 14. The training institution has a variety of technical means and materials that support learning. 15. The training institution is prepared to respond to unforeseen situations and customer objections.
IV. Standards for quality management in training company	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Training institution has a coherent strategy which describes directions of development. 17. Training institution shall publish reliable information on services. 18. Training institutions use system solutions which support high quality of services. 19. Training institution disseminates knowledge about best practices in ensuring the quality of training. 20. Training organization offers services in accordance with applicable laws and requirements imposed by external regulations.

Source: [Przewodnik... 2012].

MSUES requirements are much easier to understand and implement than ISO 29990:2010. Most organizations do not need the help of professional consultants. This significantly reduces the cost of implementation. This is an advantage especially in training companies that do not employ specialists in the field of management.

5. Comparison of described standards

Presented standards in a different way approach the regulation of the training activities. The ISO 29990:2010 focuses on the organizational and managerial issues, while MSUES emphasises the substantive ones. For this reason, training companies, which could compare both standards in practice, emphasise the high degree of matching MSUES to their specific business. Vagueness and ambiguity of ISO 29990:2010 requirements discourage from using it. Comparison of standard requirements was presented in table 3. Almost all the key issues are described by both standards. However, in the case of ISO 29990:2010 far-reaching freedom of interpretation was left for companies, while MSUES requirements are specified more precisely.

Both standards touch similar issues, but they differ in scope and detail of requirements. As shown in the table, ISO 29990:2010 ignores the issues of support for participants after training and lifelong learning. These activities are outside the scope of some training companies. However, they help to enhance company reputation.

Critics of ISO pay attention to the ambiguity of the standards, imprecision and need for the interpretation of the requirements. In the case of ISO 9000 standards, this problem has been reduced by using precise records, as well as by a number of publications and interpretations that are available on the market. In contrast, ISO 29990:2010 is left wide open to an interpretation. Different interpretations of requirements from companies and auditors, can lead to finding non-compliance during audits. Particularly questionable are the requirements, which use the expression “when appropriate”. From the point of view of the standard authors this formula was to provide a flexible approach to a very diverse training sector. However, in practice, certification process may require further interpretations issued by certification companies in order to reduce ambiguity. The ambiguity stems not only from statements, but also from the lack of a practical look at the implementation of individual requirements.

An important advantage of ISO 29990:2010 is the use of a proven package of management system monitoring tools: management review, internal audits, corrective and preventive actions. This ensures compatibility with other management systems standards. They are also very effective, if used properly, in improving the system. The discussed standard is aimed at larger organizations, as evidenced by at least the cost of implementation and certification. Polish training market is not yet consolidated. A large number of training companies have 1-2 coaches. The implementation of monitoring tools in such an organization is possible, but in many cases impractical.

Table 3. Comparison of ISO 29990:2010:2010 and MSUES

Requirement	ISO 29990:2010	MSUES
Strategy and policy	3.5.1, 4.2	1.1, 16.1
Analysis of training needs	3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.5.2.2, 3.5.2.3	1.1, 1.2
Gathering information about the participants	3.1.2, 4.7	1.2, 1.3
Protection of participants interests	3.1.2	1.4
Methods of participants enrolment	3.3.1	1.5*, 1.6*, 1.7*
Description of training aims	3.5.1	2.1
Training materials	3.1.3, 3.3.2	3.1, 3.2
Training methods	3.2.3	3.3, 3.4
Support for participants after the training	–	4.1, 4.3*, 4.4*
Feedback for participants	4.10	4.2*
Assessment of learning outcomes	3.5.1, 3.5.2.5, 4.10	5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4*, 5.5*
Supervision	3.4	6.1, 6.2
Ensuring high substantive competences of staff	4.6	6.3*, 7.1, 7.2*
Ensuring training skills of staff	4.6	8.1, 8.2*, 8.3*
Continuous improvement of staff competences	4.4	9.1, 9.2*
Support of lifelong learning	–	10.1*, 10.2*, 10.3*, 19.1, 19.2*
Procedures for training organization	3.2.3	11.1
Training conditions	3.3.3, 4.8	12.1, 12.2*, 12.3*, 13.1, 14.1, 14.2*
Dealing with complaints	4.4	15.1
Emergency handling	4.4	15.2
Reliable training offer	3.2.1	17.1, 17.2, 17.3
Evaluation of the training staff	3.5.3.5, 4.6	18.1, 18.2
Record keeping	3.2.2	18.3
Compliance with requirements of the law, licences and other regulations	3.5.2.4	3.2, 20.1, 20.2
Supervision of the system	4.1, 4.3	–
Monitoring of the system	4.9	–

* – optional; recommended, but not required for certification.

Source: own study.

Unlike ISO 29990:2010, there are no concepts of audit, corrective and preventive actions and management review in MSUES. Less emphasis has been put on formal documentation. In contrast, the substantive issues are treated broadly and associated with the preparation and implementation of training activities. MSUES takes into account the compatibility with European legislation regarding education [*Recommendation... 2008; Council... 2007*].

There are some worth noticing differences which do not directly concern the requirements included in both standards. They refer to:

1. Language version of the document: ISO 29990:2010 was published in French and English, but it has not been published in Polish, while MSUES are currently available only in Polish.

2. Availability of the standards: ISO 29990:2010 is sold in Poland by ISO for 88 CHF (350 PLN). However, it cannot be purchased from the *Polski Komitet Normalizacyjny*. On the other hand, MSUES are available for free on the Internet.

3. Comprehensibility: The language style of ISO 29990:2010 is of a specific nature. It might be unclear for people who have not dealt with management systems standards like e.g. ISO 9001:2008 before. MSUES are written clearly and unambiguously.

4. The costs of certification: The ISO 29990:2010 certification service is paid while MSUES certification is free (at least during the pilot project).

5. Popularity of the certificates: The 2014 data shows that around 39 companies worldwide were certified with ISO 29990:2010 standard and 150 were certified with MSUES.

6. Conclusions

Implementation of the standards requires regulation and formalization of activities in training companies. A lot of training companies are run by people without managerial qualifications. For them this approach to managing organization is a novelty. Introduction of transparent procedures streamlines processes, reduces the risk of omitting important tasks or improper execution thereof. Therefore it represents a starting point for the improvement of processes. Problems identified during the preparation and implementation of standards can be solved within the framework of continuous improvement loop.

High requirements for trainers are important for improving the quality of services. For a training company staff is a key factor in quality as perceived by customers. The standards limit the possibility of training provided by inexperienced coaches. They introduce requirements for recruitment and evaluation of training staff. The other important factor of quality are training conditions. Well-lit and equipped room, proper thermal conditions, as well as a relevant organization of the course enhance the ability to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills.

The standards also regulate the information policy of training companies, especially in terms of their offer. In place of the laconic information about training sent to the customers, sometimes limited to a title, they require extensive information on the objectives, program and trainers. The requirement to publish the information on the website (MSUES only) introduces a significant change in the training market. So far, a certain percentage of companies do not publish their offers to hinder coping

them by competitors. Offers testify to the innovation and the level of competence of the company.

Implementation of standards has therefore a significant impact on the functioning of the training market. Undoubtedly it improves the quality of services provided by training companies. It also allows customers to find quality companies among the large number of offers more easily.

Both analysed standards can play an important role in the development of the Polish market of training services. The requirements included in them may be utilized by owners or managers of the training firms in order to improve the quality of their activities.

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