PUBLIC MANAGER IN THE MUNICIPALITY IN THE ERA OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS (EXEMPLIFIED BY THE SIEDLECKI SUBREGION)

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Abstract. The beginnings of the twenty-first century show that one of the most important signs of a well-functioning organization is to provide public services with high quality, moving away times when the recipient of public services meant nothing. Currently, in the centre of a well-functioning public organization is the client. That is why each unit should operate in an efficient, transparent way and with considered needs that are reported by customers. Unfortunately, the actual functioning of the offices has been seen a little differently. Often there are heard opinions of the poor quality of services provided by the public authorities, about information noise and long waiting period during working hours, what as a consequence causes the frustration on the client side.

According to the above arguments, public organizations are trying to introduce modern management methods to support the internal organization of work and the process of the provision of services in the context of a greater focus on the customer. The purpose of this article is to show the role of customer orientation in contemporary public organizations on the example of the Office in the local government unit.

Keywords: New Public Management, managerial skills, intelligent municipality, changes in local public units.

1. Introduction

Implementing leadership and public management changes in a municipality is a long-term process which requires skills to surmount resistance of numerous interest groups and parties. Local public managers operating in the local territory have to demonstrate a political talent,

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possess the attributes of a strategist and the capability to sense the interests of a range of parties and to find a middle ground¹.

Possessing numerous competencies, qualifications and personal characteristics and following specific rules and moral norms is essential. What is equally important in the realizing and accomplishing given goals and assumptions is the work experience and aptitude in dealing with problems which may arise during fulfilling daily duties. People in power in the institutions of the public sector must set working for the society as their target that is they should have the ability to solve the society's problems and to fulfil people's needs in the era of transformations and economic and political turbulences. It is thus easily noticeable that modern public managers must be people of multifaceted personalities due to the fact that over the last two decades public administration had to undergo certain modifications in order to find its ground and adjust to the new situation and transformations into more market oriented economy, especially in the era of economic crisis.

The main objective of this article is an attempt to verify the posture (characteristics, skills and educational background) of public managers in the process of management of territorial self-government units. The scope of research covers municipalities of the Siedlecki subregion. For this purpose the following specific objectives have been identified:

- 1. Diagnosis of principal managerial features and skills among local mayors in municipalities across the district;
- 2. Assessment of research on the issues of local managers dealing with changes according to economic crisis conditions;
- 3. Definition of public managers and an intelligent municipality.

2. Research methodology

Key objectives of this study were defined above and the featured surveys were conducted in all municipalities of the Siedlecki district, thus the selection of research sample was not random.

Siedlecki district lies in the eastern part of Mazowieckie province covering the territories around Siedlee – a city having the rights of a district. The district comprises thirteen municipalities: Domanice,

¹ W. Wereda, Creating leadership in an Intelligent municipality as an element of competitive advantage of the unit in the subregion (exemplified by the Siedlecki subregion) [w:] S. Majtan a kolektiv (red.) Aktualne problemy podnikovej sfery, Wydawnictwo EKONOM, Bratislava 2012, p. 627.

Korczew, Kotuń, Mokobody, Mordy, Paprotnia, Przesmyki, Siedlce, Skórzec, Suchożebry, Wiśniew, Wodynie and Zbuczyn. All municipalities used to belong to the former Siedleckie province. Siedlecki district borders with five districts from Mazowieckie province: Garwoliński, Łosicki, Miński, Sokołowski and Węgrowski, two districts from Lubelskie province: Bialski and Łukowski as well as Siemiatycki district from Podlaskie province. There are 82,000 inhabitants, the least inhabitants are in Domanice municipality, the most around the City of Siedlce. An average density of population remains at the stable level for a few years and amounts to 51 persons per km2. On the territory of the district there is a solely one town – Mordy having 2,000 inhabitants².

The technique chosen to collect data was based on a prepared questionnaire presented to managers of selected units on personal consults. The population surveyed encompassed merely 12 local mayors because one of the local mayors did not express the intention to participate in the questionnaire survey. The surveys were carried out in June 2011. The persons covered by the survey, as previously mentioned, included public managers holding the office of the local mayor in the territory of Siedlecki district. The questionnaire survey involved personal handing over questionnaires to parties concerned, in one case only the questionnaire was sent electronically by e-mail.

Subsequently, the collected data was analyzed by using basic mathematical and statistical methods of calculations. Methods of induction, comparison and verification were also used in order to draw conclusions from the findings.

3. Public manager – a trial of the identification

The phrase "public management" emerged within the process of advancing public administration. Public management fully supplanted traditional administration in the public sector both in the domain of practice and theory. A new approach to public organization management abandoned a prevailing way of viewing "public administration" as well as its function performed³. Talking broadly about this term it should be pointed out that it is based on different fields as it is mentioned below.

A trend based on public management which entirely replaced traditional public administration was manifested in several countries in

² W. Wereda, Creating leadership..., op.cit., p. 643.

³ A. Frączkiewicz-Wronka, (ed.) *Zarządzanie publiczne-elementy teorii i praktyki*, Wyd. Akademii Ekonomicznej, Katowice 2009, s. 27.

varied forms, thus conferring diverse names into a new model of public management:

- New Public Management (NPM);
- Managerialism;
- Entrepreneurial government;
- Market-based public administration⁴.

So many labels denoting the same phenomenon reflects a diverse manner of perceiving ongoing changes by numerous authors in a given field. Among the identified models the most popular and practically evolved public management model is market management, mainly termed as New Public Management (NPM)⁵.

In many countries administrative reform focused on public management has become a priority matter to restore and transform the public sector into a market oriented economy. New Public Management was designed to draw inspiration from the private sector to boost the efficiency of operations in the public sector. According to R.A.W. Rhodes, P. Dunleavy, Ch. Hood the new public management emphasizes "...performance appraisal and efficiency; the disaggregation of public bureaucracies into agencies which deal with each other on a user-pay basis; the use of quasi-markets and contracting out to foster competition; cost-cutting; and a style of management which emphasizes, amongst other things, output targets, limited term contracts, monetary targets and incentives, and freedom to manage" (Rhodes, 1991: 11; Dunleavy & Hood, 1994)⁷.

An attempt to define "public management" was made also by Prof. Barbara Kożuch who holds that "public management is a scholarly discipline committed to studying the manners and the scopes of harmonizing activities that ensure appropriate formulation of objectives by organizations forming the public sphere, and of the optimal use of opportunities provided by organized activities by people, revolving around creating public values and realizing public interest". People who are

⁴ A. Zalewski, *Nowe zarządzanie publiczne...op.cit.*, p. 26.

⁵ J. Hauser, *Od idealnej biurokracji do zarządzania publicznego*, [In:] Studia z zakresu zarządzania publicznego, (ed.) J. Hauser, M. Kukiełka, Wydawnictwo AE, Kraków 2002, pp. 62-64.

⁶ W. Wereda, Creating leadership...op.cit., p. 643.

⁷ 1) P. Dunleavy, Ch. Hood, From Old Public Administration to New Public Management, "Public Money & Management", no 1/3 (July-September) 1994, pp. 9-16.

²⁾ R.A.W Rhodes, *The New Public Management*, "Public Administration" no 69/1 (Spring) 1991.

⁸ B. Kożuch, *Zarządzanie publiczne. W teorii i praktyce polskich organizacji*, PLACET, Warszawa 2004, p. 10.

performing in public organizations can be broadly called public managers and, for example, L. R. Jones, F. Thompson and W. Zumeta claim that the world in which public managers function is rapidly changing and is vastly different from that contemplated by the early intellectual stalwarts of public administration. Public agencies are expected to collaborate with each other, with nonprofit organizations and with citizen groups and to use modern technology strategically to manage and deliver services. They are under powerful pressures to use resources efficiently as markets and quasimarkets influenced by global forces play a much greater role in structuring service delivery. Within this context public agencies must manage human resources accordingly, yet also humanely and legally⁹.

Continuing, public managers manage people and/or programs that serve the public. Some plan for cities, others educate children, regulate industries, promote public health, and provide security. These managers bring together the participants necessary to pursue and enact their core tasks¹⁰. M. S. Feldman and A. M. Khademian in their later work point out that these managers should perform inclusive public management which has two broad premises:

- 1. Bringing people from different perspectives together in ways that allow them to appreciate one another's perspectives will enhance the design;
- 2. Implementation of policies.

Among the potential perspectives, three stand out as foundational: (1) the *political*, (2) the *scientific or technical*, and (3) the *local or experienced-based* perspective. These perspectives are all important in the formulation, adoption, and implementation of plans and programs. Inclusive management requires attention to all three perspectives in the production of effective programs and policies. The second premise of inclusive management is that informed deliberative processes are fundamental to democracy. The public manager as inclusive manager facilitates the practice of democracy by creating a community of participation where people can share information from different perspectives and together work together on problems¹¹.

⁹ L. R. Jones, F. Thompson and W. Zumeta, Public management for the new millennium: developing relevant and integrated professional curricula, on-line version document in pdf format, p. 19.

¹⁰ M. S. Feldman, A. M. Khademian, *To Manage Is to Govern*, "Public Administration Review', no 62/2002, pp. 529-541.

¹¹ M. S. Feldman and A. M. Khademian, The Role of the Public Manager in Inclusion: Creating Communities of Participation, on-line version document in pdf format, p. 306.

As a result of surveys conducted in Siedlecki District the local public managers themselves indicated the traits which in their viewpoints appear critical to local management. Hence, according to those surveyed a local public manager is an individual who should undoubtedly possess numerous multifarious skills that could create conditions for efficient and effective operations.

Having completed the survey, the profile of a respondent, i.e. of a local public manager in Siedlecki District, was established. As it was mentioned above, 12 people participated in the questionnaire, 11 men and only one woman. The most numerous group of respondents comprised people at the age from 46 to 55 years old, who constituted as much as 50% of all respondents. 34% of the respondents were between 36 and 45 years old and only 8% of all surveyed people were at the age between 25 and 35 and above 55 years old. Asked about the level of their education, all public managers answered that they have higher education. It should not come as a surprise to anyone, as at this kind of posts higher education is an essential requirement. Regarding experience, a vast majority, that is 75% of all respondents, stated that they had more than fifteen years of experience. 17% of those polled had between 6 and 10 years of experience. Only 8% of the respondents admitted that they had little experience. Nobody opted for the 11-15 years of experience variant in the questionnaire. The question concerning the seniority of the managers juxtaposed with the one regarding the age leads to the conclusion that it is highly unlikely for a relatively young person to have such a huge work experience required at the posts of public managers. The most numerous group of respondents comprised people who had been holding the post of a public manager for more than eight years, i.e. 42% of all respondents. 25% of respondents had been at the post for 3 to 5 years and the same number falls in the range between 6 and 8 years. The least numerous group, only 8% of all those polled, are people working less than 2 years at the post. Answering the next and last question regarding the monthly salary received by a public manager, the vast majority of respondents, 58%, indicated a sum between 6,500 and 9,500 zlotys. 25% of the surveyed people earned no more than 6,000 zlotys. The least often variant chosen by the respondents was the salary above 9,500 zlotys, only 17% opted for that option. The above results show that the salaries vary. There is not one fixed sum that a manager employed in a public organization ears. An average public manager is a man at the age between 46 and 55 years old with vast work experience, more than 15 years including managerial experience amounting to 8 years, and with monthly salary between 7,500 and 9,500 zlotys (net pay).

According to the respondents (fig. 1), the most important manager's task is planning and setting goals (29% of all answers). The next most important activity is organizing, which received 24% of all votes. Obtaining funding from the European Union was chosen by 19% of respondents. Subsequently, obtaining external funding was indicated by 12% of the surveyed. 9% indicated the controlling tasks, and the least often marked answeres were leadership (4%), innovativeness and introduction of changes (3%).

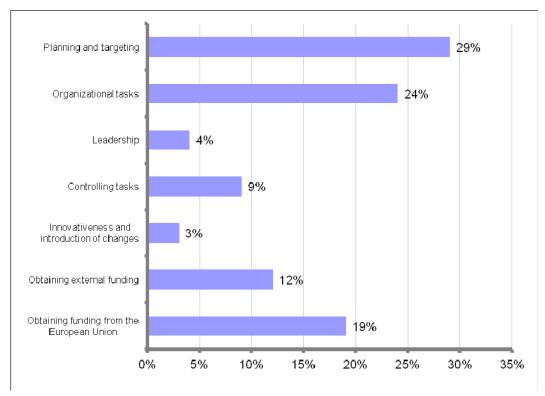


Figure 1. The most important activities of a public manager.

Source: own study based on research.

In the respondents' view, the most important public manager's task is planning and setting goals. Innovativeness and introduction of changes turned out to be less essential.

One of the grounds on which resistance appears among the employees of an organization is the process of implementation of changes. That phenoment is directly linked with the next question the respondents were asked, the question concerning the phenomenon of resistance among employees in municipality. It appears, on the basis of the conducted

research, that 58% of the respondents claim that they have not encountered any resistance on the part of the employees. The reminig part of the respondents, that is 42%, stated that such a phenomenon took place.

In such a situation one may attempt to put forward two theories, although it is hard to ascertain which one is more true. First of all, public managers have not encountered any resistance on the part of their employees due to the fact that they are highly skilled in using preventive management methods which eliminate resistance at its source, or they do not implement any radical/significant changes in the public organization.

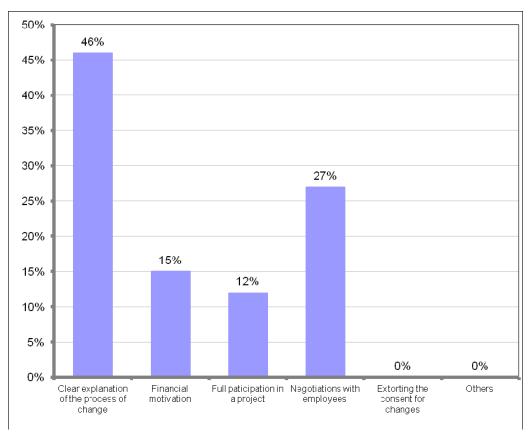


Figure 1. The most common methods used to minimize resistance among employees.

Source: own study on the basis of research.

The most often answer marked and the most commonly used method of minimizing the resistance is the clearest possible explanation of the process of changes, which constitutes 56% of all answers. 27% of all respondents indicated negotiations with the employees. Less frequent were answers such as: financial motivation (15%), fighting against the

employees' resistance by fully engaging members of the organization in the project (only 12% of all answers provided). The option of forcing the employees to give their consent for changes was not marked by any respondents (fig. 2).

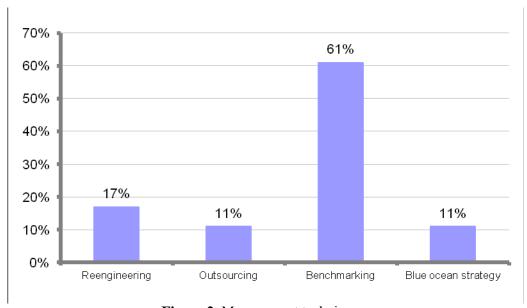


Figure 2. Management techniques.

Source: own study on the basis of research.

The technique referred to as Benchmarking was the most often chosen answer, 62% of respondents opted for it. 17% of all answers concerned the technique called Reengineering. Other techniques chosen by the respondents were Outsourcing and the Blue Ocean Strategy. Both these options received 11% of all answers each (fig. 3).

4. The economic crisis and changes in municipality management

The last eight years have been the time of the biggest recession in the world economy which resulted from the financial crisis caused by erroneousness in the American mortgage market¹². The symptoms of the crisis appeared already in 2006 and since then prices of estates in the USA have dropped significantly enough to shake not only the American

¹² A. Niemczyk, R. Seweryn, *Przyjazdy turystów amerykańskich do Krakowa w obliczu kryzysu*, [in:] A. Gotowt-Jeziorska, K. Łopaciński (ed.) *Turystyka w Polsce w okresie kryzysu*, Polskie Stowarzyszenie Turystyki, Warsaw 2011, pp. 143-158.

domestic economy but also the world economy. Due to that fact the world has entered a new economic era – from normality to economic and social turbulences.

The effects of the global economic crisis have been experienced by the Polish society, Polish local authorities and by Polish municipalities, too. Due to the fact that since 2004 Poland has been a member of the European economy our public managers are obliged to comply with the rules of economic and financial policies binding in the European Union. Public feelings correlate with the changes in people's salaries and adverse conditions for businesses. In spite of the current crisis conditions, local authorities, similarly to other business entities, have to continue fulfilling their mission in all domains including management and market-related functions. They have to accomplish their tasks and social expectations regarding how public money is spent must be fulfilled. Members of society expect the managers of the units of local authorities to possess the abilities of effective management regardless of circumstances or crisis turbulences.

Many of the assumed goals or statutory functions are difficult to realize due to economic slowdown the effects of which are experienced by municipalities in a variety of fields of their activity. The crisis forces decision-makers to use sources of financing from outside the budget, to manage the European Union funding effectively, to search for external investors and to adjust to the banks' "cautious" strategies, and to look for various cheap marketing and market related solutions to promote their municipalities at the regional and even international level. Polish municipalities have faced up to the necessity to function in the era of limited economic growth, increasing unemployment, decrease in tax revenue, decrease in the deficit of the public finance sector and the control of the debt level and in the situation in which many public obligations have been transferred to the local market with low financial support on the part of the central government budget.

In the era of unstable economic changes and development of local municipalities, public managers (of different level) should be the ambassadors of changes, that is they should undertake the role of active leaders taking the responsibility for implementation, realization and appraisal of the effectiveness of the changes. It is essential for them to be able to exert influence on each employee and at the same time to be role models to be followed and imitated. However, it must be remembered that people's attitudes change due to social and economic situation. A given situation, circumstances, course of events and the presence of third parties

are the factors that influence people's attitude. Due to that, managerial attitudes can be grouped in three categories:

- 1. Positive attitude assumed goals have been achieved;
- 2. Passive attitude they do not support but rather delay the realization of goals;
- 3. Negative attitude they delay or even block the realization of goals¹³.

In order to manage changes effectively, public mangers need to possess qualities of a good observer to be able to take notice of all signs of resistance against the changes, both proposed and those being in the process of implementation. One should remember that resistance against changes can be avoided if all employees are well informed regarding the planned implementation. When employees do not know about the changes, resistance is their most common response. Many people do not like changes; they prefer to adhere to their habits, traditions and patterns from the past. Changes regarding hierarchy and positions of leaders are especially dangerous. Participation of subordinates in the implementation of those changes is highly desirable; however, resistance in the course of those changes is a real and possible threat. Managers have to be familiar with various managerial techniques and have to use them in practice in the process of introducing changes. In a situation when managers intend to overcome resistance and implement some changes, they should undertake the following steps:

- 1. Consult the members of an organization regarding their fears, opinions and reactions that will allow to select appropriate methods which lead to reaching an agreement between the employees and the managers, who are introducing changes;
- **2. Improve the process of communication** providing employees with detailed information regarding the planned changes, the reasons for them and effects of them should contribute to employees' better understanding the changes' essence and, what follows, to decreasing the employees' uncertainty;
- **3.** Engage all people who the changes will concern in active participation in the process of their preparation and implementation the employees should understand the aim and structure of the changes as they are part of them and they are working on them. Due to that they will be less suspicious;

¹³ B. Kożuch, *Zarządzanie publiczne, W teorii i praktyce polskich organizacji*, Placet, Warszawa 2004, p. 230.

- **4. Educate oneself and the employees** doing that the employees of an organization will prepare themselves for changes. They should be educated both before and during the introduction of changes. Due to that the new situation will be more understandable;
- **5. Support** the employees should feel they have the support of their authorities. They should know that their problems are not neglected and their opinions are taken into account in the process of making the most important decisions;
- **6.** Negotiate and make contracts with the employees of an organization the employees who decide to approach the changes positively may in return be offered more advantageous conditions of further cooperation;
- **7. Manipulate and impel** a manager should convince the members of an organization that changes are introduced in their best interest, should give them a chance to participate in the processes such as designing and implementing of the changes. Due to that the employees will identify with the organization, the logic of its functioning and the rightness of the introduced changes;
- **8. Force (overtly or covertly)** threatening the employees is a very risky and dangerous method and it is used in the cases of individual resistance. However, one must bear in mind that forcing somebody to do something never results in emergence of positive feelings. The opposite, it causes the employee to increase the distance and it may destroy the good relationship¹⁴.

According to P. Kotler and J. A. Caslione the process of managing in a public organization in chaos should be designed mainly by means of an appropriate marketing system¹⁵. The era of crisis, when there is no demand for new investments, is a good time to prepare the ground for new investments and good conditions for development in the future. It is a good idea to devote this time to conducting some marketing research and to introducing some organizational changes. When the crisis has finished, the municipality will be ready for accepting foreign investors. The results of revival will not be visible in the next few years, especially in the context of the novelization of the 2013 budget. In the newly published special report, Fitch Ratings¹⁶ presents the challenges that the units of local government in

¹⁴ B. Kożuch, *Zarządzanie...op.cit.*, pp. 230 and next.

¹⁵ P. Kotler, J. A. Caslione, *Chaos – zarządzanie i marketing w erze turbulencji*, MT Biznes Sp. z o.o., 2009.

¹⁶ Wskaźnik długu wyzwaniem dla samorządów, Portal Samorządowy, www.portalsamorzadowy.pl, [Access at 2013.08.06].

Poland will have to face in the years 2013 and 2014 due to new debt rates. The new debt rate is curbing investments but improves the operational results of the local governments. That perspective allows studying the positive aspects of the era of crisis.

5. Leading to the intelligent municipality in the era of economic crisis and changes. Conclusions

The study of the literature and the research conducted have allowed for drawing a few conclusions. Summarizing the main points, one will notice a specific duality - both positive aspects of the functioning of an organization in the context of public management executed by managers, and negative sides, which merely indicate that the results may vary when related to the aim of jobs. Upgrading the managers' competencies through participating in all kinds of training courses is a very important matter in the new public management. Unfortunately, this principle is not realized by Polish municipalities. Public managers do realize that improving their skills influences the development of an organization but still they do not upgrade their qualifications in a significant way. If at all, they only enrol on some very short courses. According to the subsequent NZP's assumption, it must be emphasized that public managers should make use of the methods and techniques known from the private sector. However, from the conducted research it shows that municipality heads rarely resort to those techniques and if they do that, they only use the most popular ones. The reason for that might be the lack of knowledge of modern solutions which makes it impossible to use them in accomplishing everyday goals. One of the most important roles of a public manager is managing the process of implementing changes in an organization. In most municipalities of Siedlecki District, there is no resistance against changes on the part of the employees. It is a very positive and auspicious situation. The question emerges whether the reason for that is using well in advance instruments and methods preventing resistance, or it is due to the fact that managers are not introducing changes according to the guidelines of New Public Management.

Transformation of the traditional organization into an intelligent one is a complex process requiring much effort from the whole organization. It is vital to change the approach of all employees towards their own development, enhancing qualifications and acquiring knowledge and then harnessing it for firm's advancement and boosting the effectiveness of its operations. An intelligent organization is much more than a learning

organization as it is capable of exploiting the effects yielded by learning for the benefit of its own development and for winning a leading market position¹⁷.

Therefore, it proves difficult to define a charter of the intelligent municipality, relying on above mentioned traits inherent to an intelligent organization as principles for functioning territorial self-government units are principally anchored in statutes and a strong impact exerted by a community and varied interest groups.

When defining a unit as intelligent the author largely means the persons who manage this municipality and the entire administration which helps implement these decisions. To recognize the specifics of functioning of the so-called intelligent municipality it is necessary to determine the traits which should distinguish it from other municipalities, regardless of its location and size. Such a municipality should:

- 1. Fulfil its fundamental tasks specified by the statutes.
- 2. Manage funds so as to meet these goals, seeking out the most elaborate financial sources (majority of municipalities fund their investment activities from budget resources and bank loans and credits, disregarding instrument on a capital market and EU funds).
- 3. Provide opportunities for boosting competences and learning foreign languages (if a municipality cannot afford to co-finance teaching a few languages, at least it should fund the English language) for personnel of the municipality offices.
- 4. Be open and implement changes related with market mega trends¹⁸ e.g. enabling enterprises and local communities to import skills and knowledge from other regions, and even countries.
- 5. Encourage new companies and investors to settle on the territory of the municipality not only through standards action strategies, but chiefly through enhancing the brand and image of the unit, creating virtual municipality office and offering the lowest operation costs for business entity on its territory, e.g. in the form

¹⁷ Report: Development trends of intelligent organizations in the global economy, PARP, Warszawa, listopad 2009, p. 15.

Megatrends concerned with globalization of markets and enterprises, establishment of supranational power systems (international alliances, establishment of global corporation), shifts in systems of consumers' values (heightened significance of individualism, partnership and business ethics), development of communication methods (development of services based on IT and ICT networks, invasion of new technologies with multiple applications, innovativeness of services and products, growth of interorganizational relations, networking and co-opetition.

- of lower taxes within a grace period, shortened time for acquiring permits for activities on its territory and others.
- 6. Make available information points to inhabitants which present the updated data with regard to the municipality, region and economic trends across the globe.
- 7. Make use of broadly understood promotion elements to create its brand and image.
- 8. Strengthen bonds between the municipality and a local community through augmenting the quality of elementary education, searching foundations assisting remarkably talented children from rural areas or giving access and opportunities for using internet services throughout the whole municipality.
- 9. Elect such leaders who possess not only adequate education but also are capable of persuading local community to leverage strong assets of the municipality to the maximum extent, and are able to reduce its weak points and cope with threats.
- 10. Ensure the society has access to standard technical and social infrastructure and model fundamentals for development focused on export and import of experiences with other municipalities, cities or regions¹⁹.

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