

# Standards of plain language and its impact on the quality of customer service of the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund (KRUS)

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## Abstract

The quality of service in government offices has long been a subject of research and discussion. Public administration units are introducing many changes in their operation to ensure better and faster service delivery. The good image of an office is created primarily by the competence of its employees. It is worth noting that the provision of services by government officials is not an easy task. A very important aspect of working in any office is the communication process. The use of plain language principles facilitates communication between officials and customers. This is the way recommended by experts and advocates of the idea of simplifying public communication.

The purpose of this article is to show how the use of plain language in the office affects the quality of customer service. To achieve the assumed objective, a survey among KRUS customers was conducted using a face-to-face survey method.

The article introduces the customer in public administration and definitions of terms such as administration, customer, service and quality. The process of communication using plain language principles was also presented. Before the article was written, a review of the available literature on public administration and plain language standards had been conducted. References were made to the works of Marek Bugdol, Tomasz Piekot, the article "Customer at the heart of administration", and the Integrated Management System of the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund, among others.

**Keywords:** public administration, quality, customer, plain language, customer satisfaction, office, services.

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## Introduction

In recent years, the relationship between the office and the citizen has undergone a significant transformation. The consequence of the new approach of the public administration to the citizen is that it recognizes his/her needs and carries out activities so as to meet such needs. The citizen changes his/her status from an interested person to customer whose opinion has an impact on shaping the service. The role of an official, who becomes his/her advisor, is also changing. Working with customers is a basic duty in administration. Providing this kind of service is not an easy job due to the overload of interpersonal contacts. It is important to emphasize here the importance of proper preparation of an official to work with the customer. To this end, numerous training sessions are conducted to familiarize an employee with practical tools for effective communication and ways to deal with negative emotions, as well as to help shape the necessary competencies.

The social movement of plain language reached Poland in 2010. Then the Ministry of Regional Development began to study the difficulty of the language of texts about European Funds<sup>1</sup>. In 2012, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the Mazovian Governor and the Council for the Polish Language initiated the “Citizen Friendly Official Language” project. According to the Commissioner for Human Rights, raising the level of official language culture is an important, even essential, support for the further development of civil society and a democratic state. In 2013, under the scientific editorship of E. Czerwińska and R. Pawelec the book titled “Polish from the office. On the correctness of official language” was published. It discusses the basic concepts of language culture in relation to official language, as well as the basic features of official style and the general principles of correct formulation of official texts, as well as the terminology characteristic of official style<sup>2</sup>.

The public administration is responsible for the quality and accessibility of the services it provides, and the language it uses is relevant. On 17 December 2020, the Civil Service Chief Dobrosław Dowiat-Urbański signed the “Recommendation for the Dissemination of Plain Language”. This is a document intended to help spread plain language in the civil service.

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1. J. Miodek, M. Maziarz, T. Piekot et al., *Jak pisać o Funduszach Europejskich?*, Warszawa 2010.

2. E. Czerwińska, R. Pawelec, *Polski z urzędu. O poprawności języka urzędowego*, Warszawa 2013.

## Customer in administration

There are many definitions of administration – they have changed over time. Public administration in Poland was initially treated as a legal field. It was mostly practised by lawyers supported by experts in management, organization and organization sociology. Nowadays, public administration is gradually transforming into a discipline that is important for economic specialists. Solutions and patterns used in business, previously subjected to adaptation processes due to the distinctive functions of public institutions aimed at producing public goods, rather than purely market-based ones, are reaching the public sector<sup>3</sup>.

Today, this administration is moving away from the model of a perfect bureaucracy, based on the independent and routine performance of identical simple tasks. It is becoming an interdisciplinary science. It strives to develop complex problems in an institutionalized manner, working with numerous domestic, foreign, local, public business and social partners<sup>4</sup>.

Public administration is nowadays defined as a set of organizational and executive activities, actions and undertakings carried out for the realization of the public interest by various entities, bodies and institutions, on the basis of the law and in the forms prescribed by law<sup>5</sup>. Administration is not only tasks, structure and technology, but also a set of factors that co-create the whole, tied by people.

The use of the term “customer” to refer to a person coming to a public institution to exercise his/her right or perform his/her duty has not been controversial for some time. The relationship between the office and the citizen has undergone a profound transformation throughout history. The consequence of the new approach of the public administration to the citizen is that it recognizes his/her needs and carries out activities so as to meet such needs. The citizen changes his/her status from an interested person at the mercy of officials to the customer “co-producer”, whose opinion shapes the service. On the other hand, an official assumes a new role as a customer’s advisor, making it easier for the customer to navigate through the maze of regulations<sup>6</sup>. The nature and importance of customers’ needs and satisfaction categories need not be clarified in business operations. In business, understanding customers’

3. S. Kowalewski, *Nauka o administrowaniu*, Wyd. II, Warszawa, Książka i Wiedza, 1982, p. 16–18.

4. J. Hausner (red.), *Administracja publiczna*, Wyd. II, Warszawa, PWN, 2005, p. 7.

5. H. Izdebski, M. Kulesza, *Administracja publiczna. Zagadnienia ogólne*, Warszawa, Liber, 2004, p. 93.

6. Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów, *Wytuczne do wdrożenia standardów zarządzania satysfakcją klienta w urzędach administracji rządowej*, article published as part of the project titled: *Klient w centrum uwagi administracji*, Warszawa 2012, p.18.

needs is fundamental in the activities that ensure the correct structure of products and services offered in the market. Therefore, it should be assumed that a customer of an office is a person who knowingly orders the performance of a service by a given office for his/her own benefit or for the benefit of the entity he/she represents<sup>7</sup>.

Modern definitions of management assume that all administrative tasks can be described as services. Public management must take into account the peculiarities of the administration's functioning, its mission to members of the public and the overriding goal of the public interest. The important elements that shape this management are the features of public services.

A public service, like any service, has an intangible and perishable aspect – it cannot be stored. It is also characterized by lack of ownership and inseparability (the service is provided and consumed at the same time), as well as diversity (despite the organization's standards, the service may be different each time, even though it is provided by the same person). The service is therefore significantly different from the product, which has implications for managing its quality<sup>8</sup>.

Services provided by the public administration are classified as professional services, characterized by the inequality of parties. The service provider is highly competent while customers often do not know or understand exactly what the applicable regulations are and do not know exactly what the service the office will provide to them consists of. An official – a professional's competence exceeds that of his/her Customer (which is why the latter seeks services from him/her), which results in the inability to assess their level of quality due to the lack of expertise of the service recipient. An official is in the position of a super-arbitrator of the quality of the services he/she provides. The necessary trust that the service recipient must have in the service provider, therefore, causes service recipients not only to have to, but also to want to, participate in the creation of a service product, constantly seeking information to correct their level of trust<sup>9</sup>. The essential role of the offices is to provide services. Recipients of the activities of public administration authorities expect both the performance of activities prescribed by law and that they be of quality. It is assumed that the services provided by the public administration should be accessible to all, and the procedures for their implementation must be known and published. Service quality should be measured and standards should be set with customers. The services implemented should be efficient and integrated in such a way that one entity

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7. *Ibidem*, p. 20.

8. I. Seredocha, *Strategie marketingowe uczelni prywatnych w Polsce*, Elbląg, Wydawnictwo EUH-E, 2007, p.14.

9. W.J. Paluchowski, *Niematerialność usług i jej psychologiczne implikacje*, Katedra Nauk Ekonomicznych WPiA UAM, Poznań 2001, p.17.

oversees them in a given area. They must also comply with the principle of equality, and their quality must be the same, regardless of customers' level of education, wealth, gender or religion<sup>10</sup>.

Offices have a social mission and therefore quality is of particular importance to them. Citizens are fully entitled to demand ever higher quality services. However, this requires some organizational and cultural changes. The quality of public administration services is a value that in turn contributes to enriching the quality of life and culture. It is also the degree to which individual and collective needs of society are met. However, the level of quality of administrative services does not always correspond to the perceived quality of life<sup>11</sup>.

The implementation of quality systems requires the involvement of employees, their preventive and corrective measures. The culture of administrative work or the ability to think in favour of third-party customers also plays a huge role<sup>12</sup>.

Professional service to citizens is not just a guideline or demand, it is a basic official duty. The obligations in this regard, whether express or implied, can be found in various legislative acts, starting with Chapter II of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, through the various statutes, regulations and orders regulating the activities of various public institutions, codes of ethics, and ending with the missions and visions contained in the orders of the heads of institutions<sup>13</sup>. According to R. Hancewicz, the duty to act efficiently and cost-effectively applies to everyone who works in the public sector. To operate efficiently and cost-effectively, it is necessary to have a professional approach to the institution's customers, so that we serve them faster and more efficiently – this makes it possible to handle more cases at the same time or devote the time saved to other important business matters<sup>14</sup>.

Currently, offices are trying to develop the best possible image. This is to be facilitated by various types of training, as well as rules and regulations or customer service manuals introduced in individual offices. These are acts that apply within a given office. The standards introduced by these acts should include information on standard ways for employees to behave when dealing with customers. In addition to documents created by individual units, nationwide programs are also emerging. The "Customer at the heart of administration" project implemented by the Prime Minister's Office in 2010–2012. It was co-financed by the European Union under

10. M. Bugdol, *Zarządzanie jakością w urzędach administracji publicznej: teoria i praktyka*, Wyd. II, Warszawa Difin, 2011, p. 9.

11. *Ibidem*, p. 18–19.

12. *Ibidem*, p. 27–28.

13. R. Hancewicz, *Profesjonalna obsługa klienta i radzenie sobie z trudnym klientem w urzędzie*, Gliwice, Helion, 2013, p. 14.

14. *Ibidem*, p. 14–15.

the European Social Fund. Based on this program, the article “Guidelines for the Implementation of Customer Satisfaction Management Standards in Government Offices” was developed<sup>15</sup>.

The good image of an office is affected primarily by the competence of its employees. Human capital is the most valuable resource of any organization. It consists of a person’s knowledge, education, skills, abilities. That is why it is so important to have competent people in official positions who are well prepared for administrative work.

Professional service in a public institution consists of:

- knowledge and substantive competence of officials understood very broadly, i.e., not only as knowledge of the law;
- communicative competence, i.e. the ability to communicate one’s substantive knowledge to the customer in such a way that he/she understands what we are talking about and knows how to proceed; without communicative competence, we cannot expect our services to be perceived as professional;
- official’s right attitude, that is, openness, commitment, willingness to help and patience;
- good organizational solutions, i.e. streamlining procedures as much as possible;
- good information system that ensures that the customer has access to the information he/she needs at every stage of handling a case, including information posted on websites, navigation in the office, the content of information letters, and how to provide information over the phone;
- the efficiency of handling a case and the time spent on handling individual cases;
- personal etiquette of all office employees;
- appropriate appearance and body language of all office representatives;
- repeatability of behaviour, i.e., a state in which every employee of every customer in every organizational unit of the office and on every working day will serve at the same level<sup>16</sup>.

The quality of the contact and the quality of the service itself are more important to the customer than substantive issues. A customer whose case was not resolved favourably may be left with the belief that the service itself was flawless and that the employee made every effort to resolve the problem. The individual skills and aptitude of the employees of the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund in building relationships with customers, as well as support from procedures are of

15. Prime Minister’s Office, *Guidelines for Implementation of Customer Satisfaction Management Standards in Government Offices*, op. cit., p. 23.

16. R. Hancewicz, op. cit., p. 32–34.

primary importance. To this end, the Integrated Management System at KRUS was created.

## Integrated Management System at KRUS

In addition to being a way to maintain and improve the quality of services, quality management systems also facilitate decision-making and introduce organizational governance through the well-defined system procedures they contain. They serve an educational and integrative function. They teach officials bureaucratic management mechanisms, pro-quality thinking and action. They combine processes into a single system with the full involvement of all employees, which translates into social integration. Implementation of the system makes bureaucratic procedures public, increases their openness and accessibility, giving customers knowledge of decision-making processes<sup>17</sup>.

At the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund, in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the management system, to minimize the risk of information loss and to achieve stakeholder satisfaction, the Integrated Management System has been developed, implemented and is being maintained in accordance with the requirements of standards. PN-EN ISO 9001:2015–10, PN-EN ISO/IEC 27001:2017–06 and PN-ISO 37001:2017–05. The system is in place at all KRUS units and organizational units, it is constantly being improved, and the standards of operation described by internal processes and procedures are a commonly practised norm<sup>18</sup>. The system documents of the Integrated Management System include, among others, the Mission and Vision, as well as the Quality Policy, one of the main goals of which, in addition to the implementation of the tasks imposed on KRUS by the Act of 20 December 1990 on social insurance for farmers, is the high quality of service to beneficiaries, including the development of e-services and the continuous improvement of employee qualifications.

### *Mission*

The mission of the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund is the effective and professional implementation of tasks under the Act on social insurance of farmers.

17. J. Łunarski, *Systemy jakości, normalizacji i akredytacji w zarządzaniu organizacjami*, Wyd. II, Rzeszów, OWPRz, 2009, p. 151–153.

18. KRUS, *Zintegrowany System Zarządzania*, Księga ZSZ, Issue XX effective 25 August 2021, p. 5.

### *Vision*

The vision of the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund is to become an innovative institution of public trust. The activities of KRUS have been focused on the continuous development and improvement of the institution, where efficient and reliable customer service is carried out on the basis of the law, the principles of rational and transparent management of financial resources, using modern technology and the potential of employees.

System documents of the Integrated Management System are developed, reviewed and approved in hard copy, and after their approval by the President of KRUS – they are published in the application supporting the IMS in electronic form<sup>19</sup>.

The tasks entrusted to the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund concern the agricultural community in Poland. KRUS is currently one of the largest institutions of government administration, providing social insurance services to farmers and carrying out other commissioned tasks financed from the state budget for the benefit of the agricultural population in the field of social policy. Performance of these tasks is the overriding objective of KRUS which involves a number of external factors, such as:

- changes in the law based on which the Fund operates;
- individual requirements and expectations of the insured and benefit recipients, as well as internal factors concerning: knowledge, qualifications and competence held by KRUS employees;
- KRUS organization (KRUS organizational regulations);
- proper allocation of powers and responsibilities of individual employees;
- IT systems used at KRUS, which determine the efficient functioning of the Fund<sup>20</sup>.

The functioning of the management system at KRUS has an impact on standardization of work, improvement of information management and its circulation in the organization, support for organizational changes, as well as building the image of KRUS as a professional and friendly organization. The Fund will benefit from a change in the attitude of the environment towards the office, an increase in the confidence of customers in the organization and its Management. Better and more efficient implementation of statutory tasks by KRUS results in greater satisfaction of the insured and benefit recipients. The point of reference for the Fund's activities is the external customer, understood as a natural person, in particular,

19. *Ibidem*, p. 13–14.

20. *Ibidem*, p. 20.



the farmer-beneficiary of KRUS services and any other entity with which the Fund cooperates. An external customer satisfaction survey is conducted at KRUS, and the results obtained are analyzed and used to take the necessary measures to increase the satisfaction of customers served by KRUS<sup>21</sup>.

While maintaining and improving the IMS, KRUS – through the actions taken by competent employees – strives to meet the legitimate needs and expectations of customers within the limits of the law in order to increase their satisfaction. Employees are the institution's greatest asset – they have the greatest impact on the quality and efficiency of work. One of the priorities in the IMS sphere is the continuous improvement of the qualifications of the Fund's employees.

An essential aspect of working in any institution is the communication process. It should be remembered that the art of communication implies, on the one hand, giving customers understandable information in a timely manner, and, on the other hand, proper interpretation of the messages that the official receives. Working with customers is not easy and requires special competence and preparation. That is why communication training sessions and workshops are so important. The Office of Human Resource Management at KRUS prepares a training plan for its employees every year. Training is carried out by specialized third-party firms ensuring a high level of service. Training topics include issues such as communication with customers, holding conversations, interpreting customer needs, responding to aggressive behaviour, and using plain and clear language in interpersonal communication.

The variety of tasks carried out by the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund often results in the complexity of a case which a customer brings to the office. The training sessions prepare employees to present a complex issue in a simple and understandable way.

The next part of the article will introduce the use of plain language.

## Plain language service

Public institutions, including the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund, increasingly value the intangible aspects of customer contact. This approach is crucial to the activities carried out. The number of institutions and companies that subscribe to the "Plain Language Declaration" is also increasing. Simple communication is one that uses accessible language and applies the principles of plain language.

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21. *Ibidem*, p. 22.

### *Thinking about the recipient*

Writing in plain language does not mean using primitive language, lowering the substantive level of communication. The idea is to make sure that the reader understands what is written to him/her.

Texts should be drafted with a recipient in mind and an awareness of his/her needs and linguistic competence.

Write as if you were writing to a close but poorly educated person.

This means keeping the text as simple and accessible as possible. Everyone, even an average educated person, should have an opportunity to understand the message. A text so formulated will make it possible to avoid criticism that the administration uses airtight language.

Try to answer the following questions:

- Who is my recipient?
- What does the recipient know about the case already?
- What should the recipient know?
- What questions does the recipient ask to himself/herself?
- What is the purpose of my text, what do I need to write to achieve it?
- What are the recipient's goals, what do I need to write to achieve them?<sup>22</sup>

In letters addressed to customers, the appropriate form is usually “Dear Madam” or “Dear Sir”. When creating a message, one should consider how to title the recipient. Avoiding directly addressing the reader, such as “a fee must be paid”, is a typical flaw in official language. Writing to a recipient using the second person (“you”) is common in manuals, guides and online transaction services. The websites have “Sign in” buttons, not “One should sign in”.

### *Keep sentences short<sup>23</sup>*

To build a short and understandable sentence, you need to take a predicate and a subject, and then add some terms to them. Ideally, all words should come from the general language, which is understandable to everyone, not just experts.

Official language tends to have long, complex sentences. Sometimes a simple word that everyone understands is turned into a long and vague multi-word structure.

22. Prepared on the basis of: J. Jaworowski, *Redagowanie pism. Czego uczy doświadczenie dziennikarskie?*, “Przegląd służby cywilnej” 2013, nr 2, p. 34–36.

23. The idea and example come from reviewer dr. hab. Jarosław Liberek, of the Institute of Polish Philology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań; Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów, *Komunikacja pisemna. Rekomendacja*, Warszawa 2017.

### *Take care of the structure of text*

The text should begin with the most important information, which should be filled with details and context. Research shows that the first 30 seconds of reading determines whether the content of the text will be interesting. This means that the beginning of the text is its most important part.

The first paragraph, consisting of about 40–60 words, should be drafted so as to explain the essence of the matter described throughout the text and build citizen confidence in our action. After reading the first paragraph, the reader should be able to tell exactly what the writing is about, what its author is demanding to help him, and how he/she justifies this. The remainder of the text serves to describe the context of the case, fill in the details, and develop the thesis of the first one or two sentences.

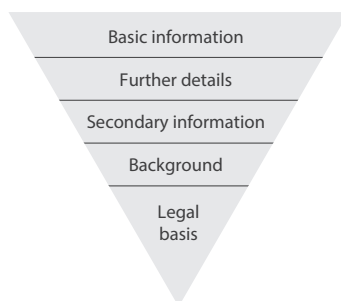
A good text should contain a brief description of the problem, the action demanded by the sender to the addressee, and the justification for the demand. In addition, the context of the case should be discussed, but only to the extent that the issue requires it. Sometimes some of the answers to the above questions are obvious from the context of the case. In such case, there is no need for additional answers.

Any subsequent sentence should follow logically from the previous one. This makes it easier to read and understand the text.

Each separate thought or element of the case should, if possible, be described in a single paragraph. If something is mentioned in the next paragraph, the issue should be described to the end and not referred to again later in the next paragraph.

The structure of the text should meet the recipient's expectations. If a procedure is described to someone, it is a good idea to keep a chronological order – a step-by-step description of the next activities. This will make it easier to understand the essence of the process presented.

**Figure 1. Text structure**



Source: Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów, “Komunikacja pisemna. Rekomendacje”, Warszawa 2017.

*Search for synonyms*

The tendency to be precise and maintain an official tone in official letters results in the use of words and expressions that have better, simple equivalents in everyday Polish. Use those of the available forms that are more understandable. This is a very effective method to improve the communicability of the text.

**Table 1. Examples of wording in official language and colloquial Polish**

<b>Official language</b>	<b>Colloquial Polish</b>
celem	aby
dokonać formalnej oceny	formalnie ocenić
dedykowany	przeznaczony
komponent	składnik, czynnik, element
kula zaczepu urządzenia sprzęgającego pojazd	hak holowniczy
niniejszy	ten
nupturienci	narzeczeni
składam zapytanie	pytam
odbyć spotkanie	spotkać się
ulec pogorszeniu	pogorszyć się
uzyskać środki	otrzymać pieniądze
w dniu dzisiejszym	dzisiaj
w miesiącu maju	w maju
z uwagi na fakt, iż	ponieważ

Source: Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów, "Komunikacja pisemna. Rekomendacje", Warszawa 2017.

*Respect the reader's time*

The official language tends to be long-winded. Sentences can drag on for many lines. It is difficult to understand them albeit easy to make a grammatical error in them. Sometimes it is useful to use hyphens or points.

### *Paragraphs for footnotes*

Official letters often refer to regulations, often quoting the long names of statutes and providing precise data. For the sake of clarity of argument, it is worth considering what part of this formal data is necessary in the main body of the document. Perhaps many of them can be moved to footnotes.

### *Communication on the Internet*

Electronic communication is one of the easiest and by far the fastest ways to transmit information. The Internet user is a discerning reader – he/she browses quickly, superficially, and looks for key information. Every day he/she receives several hundred online messages, which he/she does not read but scans with his/her eyes – from left to right, top to bottom. The title is the part of the message that first catches the reader's eye. The title should encourage him/her to read the entire text. It should be informative and dynamic. If it is not interesting to the reader, he/she will not read the remaining part. The title should not be too long, and should be based on key words – preferably in the form of a sentence equivalent or simple sentence.

The lead is the first paragraph of the message, which comes right after the title. It should be an expansion of the title and summarize the message in a few sentences. It can be highlighted by bolding or bulleting. The most important information should be provided in it.

In web texts, you should always:

- develop abbreviations;
- avoid repetition, empty words, unnecessary details;
- one paragraph means one thought;
- quote only accurate and brief statements;
- in longer texts, use mid-headings and bold print;
- no capital letters – on the Internet this is a written equivalent of shouting<sup>24</sup>.

Plain Polish language is increasingly present in the public sphere. A group of signatories of the “Plain Language Declaration” is growing every year. The Agricultural Social Insurance Fund signed the “Declaration” on 15 November 2022. Plain language supports active, two-way communication that ensures the desired reception in the form of feedback.

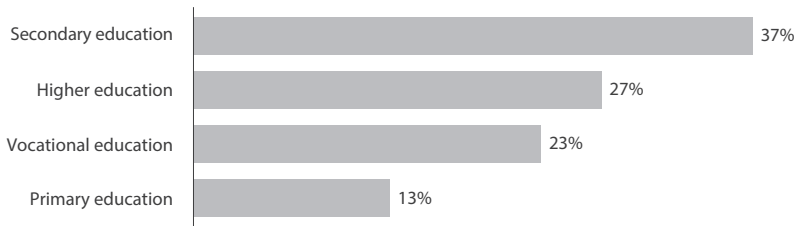
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24. Specified in Rozporządzenie RM z 12 kwietnia 2012 roku w sprawie Krajowych Ram Interoperacyjności, minimalnych wymagań dla rejestrów publicznych i wymiany informacji w postaci elektronicznej, Dz. U. 2012.

## Agricultural Social Insurance Fund – results of own research and opportunities for quality improvement

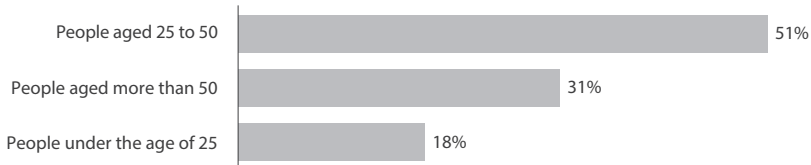
A study of expectations and experiences of KRUS customer service in Kalisz was carried out in the period from 19 April 2022 to 29 April 2022. The survey was conducted among KRUS customers on a sample of 100 people. The questionnaire was anonymous, displayed in the customer service room. The purpose of the study was to determine the impact of plain language on the quality of services provided. In the research sample, the largest group was made up of people aged 25 to 50 (51) people. The survey was filled out by 31 people aged more than 50, 18 people under the age of 25. Those with secondary education accounted for 37% of respondents, those with higher education 27%, those with vocational education 23%, and those with primary education 13%.

Figure 2. Sample characteristics by education (n=100)



Source: Own elaboration based on an empirical study.

Figure 3. Sample characteristics by education (n=100)



Source: Own elaboration based on an empirical study.

In question one of the survey, one of four options had to be chosen to answer the question: “When contacting you, did the KRUS employee convey information in a straightforward/meaningful manner?” The vast majority of respondents (83%) answered “yes” and “rather yes”, 10% did not fully understand the information

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provided by employees, and only 7% answered in the negative when asked about the clarity/meaningfulness of the information provided.

**Figure 4. Answers to the question on how to provide information**



Source: Own elaboration based on an empirical study.

The evaluations regarding the understanding of the content of the correspondence received from KRUS are quite different. 45% of respondents found the decisions and letters they receive incomprehensible or rather incomprehensible. 49% of respondents said they tended to understand the content of letters sent to them, while only 6% of respondents said the correspondence they receive is clear, lucid and understandable to them.

**Figure 5. Evaluation regarding the understanding of the content of the correspondence received on a three-point scale**



Source: Own elaboration based on an empirical study.

The final, third question of the anonymous survey was: "Would the use of plain, clear language by the staff significantly affect the quality of service according to you?" The vast majority, as many as 85%, said "yes" and "rather yes", while the opposite opinion was held by 15% of respondents.

**Figure 6. Impact of using plain language on quality of service on a two-point scale**



Source: Own elaboration based on an empirical study.

The survey shows that the quality of services provided by KRUS is not fully satisfactory to the customer. KRUS has a social mission and therefore the quality of services must be of special importance. Citizens are fully entitled to demand ever higher quality services. High quality service can lead to increased trust in institutions. Unlike in the service and industrial sectors, in public administration loyalty is not reflected in making consumer decisions. A dissatisfied customer has no other option and must continue to use the services of the authority in question.

Analyzing the survey results, it can be seen that customers' service delivery needs are changing with changing lifestyles. Customers expect simple, accessible communication from the office. According to the survey, the vast majority of customers, as many as 83%, confirmed that the information had been provided in a simple and meaningful manner. However, that leaves 17% of customers for whom the manner of information provided was not simple enough. This result of survey shows that training employees in interpersonal communication is effective. However, it is necessary to continuously improve the competence of employees necessary to follow the rules of plain language.

Survey respondents evaluate the understandability of the correspondence sent much lower. As many as 45% of respondents find the office's decisions and letters incomprehensible. Therefore, simplifying the letters and documents that a customer receives from KRUS would bring many benefits. KRUS can get a reputation as a friendlier institution – open to its customers, and therefore more satisfied with the quality of the services they receive.

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### Summary

The dynamic development of the world around us means that we are witnessing changes taking place in all aspects of life. In the past, the public sector was a closed system in which the scope and level of service delivery was determined by specialists and experts or officials, since only they had the necessary knowledge of needs, priorities, resources and policy directions. The distanced approach to human beings was justified by the need to comply with the law in terms of equal, impartial treatment of all citizens. Today's public institutions are increasingly evolving into outward-looking organizations, developing new types of interactions and relationships with different stakeholders to accomplish different sets of tasks<sup>25</sup>. Offices have a social mission and

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25. Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, *Zarządzanie satysfakcją klienta. Podręcznik szkoleniowy*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/sluzbacywilna/klient-w-centrum-uwagi-administracji>, access 20.04.2022.



therefore quality is of particular importance to them. The image of the offices of state institutions is largely built by the human factor. The expectations of members of the public with regard to public service employees are very specific and unambiguous. Every citizen expects to be served by a kind, patient and competent official.

The key to the success of state administration today is a comprehensive and systemic view of the organization, taking into account customer satisfaction. The consequence of the new approach to the citizen is to recognize his/her needs as a customer and to conduct all activities in such a way as to meet those needs. However, meeting the expectations of a public sector customer is a complicated task<sup>26</sup>.

In the near future, changes in civilization and technology will largely determine how official information is received. Maintaining the quality of knowledge at the current level will require institutions to use a new language – one that is easy to read, adapted for quick reading anywhere, any time. It is important that the official language is plain, understandable and user-friendly, so that officials think about the addressees, their needs and linguistic competence. The benefits include higher quality and availability of public services, shaping a positive image of the civil service, and saving time for both civil servants and customers of the office.

The purpose of the article is to show how the use of plain language in the office affects the quality of customer service. According to a survey conducted at KRUS, decisions and official letters written in official language are not always fully understandable to recipients. The rigid, impersonal form and reference to articles of a statute make it difficult to deduce straight away what the operative part of the decision is.

According to researchers at the Plain Polish Language Workshop of the University of Warsaw, issuing a decision in the form of a letter does not exceed the decisiveness of the act. It is important that officials simplifying decisions take care of the presence in the text of the four required components, i.e. the name of the authority, the name of the addressee, the outcome of the case and the signature of the authorized person.

The law does not dictate the order in which these elements of a decision must appear. The initial position of the legal basis is grounded in half a century of drafting practice and the assumption of the rationality of the legislator at the time. Therefore, under the current law, it is possible to develop a different order of elements of a decision, provided that the new structure expresses a logical process of inference and retains the elements required by law. The legal basis for simplified decisions could be found, for example, following the operative part or even at the end of the document, but preceding the signature.

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26. Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów, *Wytyczne do wdrożenia standardów zarządzania satysfakcją klienta w urzędach administracji rządowej*, op. cit., p. 8.

The authority issuing the decision may draft it in the first person. Assuming that the decision contains an unambiguous name of the issuing authority and that the authority uses the verbs of the decision, e.g. allow, conclude, order.

A decision addressed to a natural person can be made individual with the use of direct phrases. The correspondence of the decision, combined with the requirement to make it individual, allows for polite phrases (Mr., Mrs.) to be inserted in it. This applies primarily to decisions to which one person is a party<sup>27</sup>.

More and more public administration units, recognizing their customers' needs, as well as with a view to improving their image, are interested in introducing plain language standards.

On 15 November 2022, a ceremony was held at the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy to sign the "Plain Language Declaration" by representatives of ten public institutions. On behalf of the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund, the "Declaration" was accepted by President dr Aleksandra Hadzik. Signatories of the "Declaration" undertook, among others, to:

- strive to ensure that their employees improve the competencies necessary to follow the rules of plain language in speaking and writing;
- create language standards and encourage employees to use them;
- making employees sensitive to the needs of others – regardless of age, level of disability or level of education;
- introduce solutions in line with the idea of plain language and promote them to others.

The use of plain language standards has a significant impact on the receipt of services and, consequently, customer satisfaction.

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27. T. Piekot, *W poszukiwaniu uniwersalnej metody upraszczania pism urzędowych i decyzji administracyjnych*, Wrocław, Instytut Filologii Polskiej, 2018, p. 118.

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