

EVALUATION OF QUALITY POLICY OF SELECTED COMPANIES IN THE CONTEXT OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT INDEPENDENCE

Michał MOLENDĄ

Silesian University of Technology, Faculty of Organization and Management, Institute of Economics and Informatics; michal.molenda@polsl.pl; ORCID: 0000-0002-0276-742X

Purpose: The primary purpose of the article is to present a study whose subject was the assessment of the quality policies implementation in selected enterprises.

Design/methodology/approach: The deliberations are based on the related subject literature and an analysis of the long-term survey results. The practical results of the research described in this article are based on a survey of supervisory employees and middle managers, who represented the enterprise by filling out a single survey sheet. The survey was conducted in 2015-2022 among 240. enterprises operating in Poland. During the survey, independence in setting quality policy was identified for 237. enterprises. These were manufacturing and service enterprises from various industries. Enterprises were selected on the basis of proposals issued to conduct a survey. The surveyed group does not have the character of a research sample. When analyzing the survey results, no parameter estimation was made on the population of Polish enterprises. The quality policy survey sheet described 35. aspects (behaviors) characteristic of a strongly quality-oriented organization, close to the TQM philosophy (The article contains results for only 10 aspects). Respondents indicated how the behavior described in the survey is characteristic of the organization where they work. The described aspects were rated by respondents on a scale of 1 to 5. The scale adopted reflects the strength of the similarity of the behavior described in the survey to the situation in each organization.

Findings: In close to every studied Quality Policy aspects, higher score was received by companies where the standards are imposed by foreign management boards. This is connected obviously not just with standards but also with the governance. The reasons for this should become a subject of further analyses. A certain potential can be observed for national companies relating to the foreign good practice implementation.

Originality/value: Knowledge of quality management issues has been increased. The article raises the issue of implementing quality policies in companies. The quality policy was characterized by selected aspects. An evaluation of these aspects in selected enterprises was carried out, and differences dividing quality policies among independent and dependent enterprises in the implementation and supervision of quality standards were identified.

Keywords: quality policy, quality management, quality management system, improvement, Total Quality Management.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

The increasing customer requirements concerning quality of products and services and the pursuit of improved organizational efficiency are the two main challenges for modern managers. This challenge is the major cause of determining the relevant company strategy and resulting Quality Policy. Quality Policy is the term defined in ISO 9000 standards which describe comprehensive approach to quality management in business organizations. In the current version of the said standard, the Quality Policy is defined as *the intentions and direction of the organization expressed formally by the top quality management* [ISO 9000:2015]. The said formalization makes the policy equated solely with a document. It has little to do with adopted standards and managerial practices. The study and assessment of the actual Quality Policy implemented in the organization is a difficult and complex process. This is why the best way to study the Quality Policy is the survey of the organization representatives' opinions.

In the literature, we find a number of studies on evaluating the effectiveness of quality management systems in organizations or an activity such as quality management (Roszak, 2021; Wolniak, 2011, 2021; Ligarski, 2014). Among them, we do not find research results on comparing the effectiveness of these systems among companies with different independence in establishing, implementing and supervising their quality standards. This cognitive gap is the reason for the research results described in this article.

The primary purpose of the article is to present a study whose subject was the assessment of the quality policies implementation in selected enterprises. The quality policy's results were compared among 3. groups of companies. The first group (I) are independent enterprises, forming their quality policies and standards independently. These are enterprises without external supervision. The second group (II) is enterprises with national dependence. Its quality policy and standards are set externally for them. The center of authority and supervision is located on Polish territory. The last group (III) is enterprises dependent on a power center located abroad. Quality policies were compared for each group using statistical analysis.

The fundamental research question is: are there differences in the level of quality orientation of the studied groups of companies? It can be assumed that the requirements of the global market are valid in Poland. Therefore, differences in the implemented quality policy should not be apparent. In order to verify this thesis, surveys were conducted among selected enterprises. The research methodology was described at the beginning of the article.

2. The essence of the Quality Policy and its impact on the state and results of the organization

The Quality Policy should exert a strong impact on the organization operation and results. It will be possible if it does not remain just a declaration (ISO 9000:2015), if it is developed carefully and implemented effectively in the organization (Molenda, 2015, 2019). The Quality Policy should be considered a method of the organization management and operation relating to quality. A documented Quality Policy is just a short description of this method concept evidenced in other areas of the organization management and operation.

The Quality Policy taking the form of an official document plays an important role in communication between different organizational structure levels. When communicated throughout the organization, it offers improved understanding of the top management's approach to the quality aspects. Consequently, the Quality Policy is a source of information and fosters employees' involvement.

The Quality Policy integrates the quality management system with a general organization management system (Claver, Tari, 2003). The Quality Policy becomes grounds to develop and verify quality objectives. The consistency of the Quality Policy and quality objectives enables to integrate the strategic management level fully with the quality-related operational management level (Pacana, Stadnicka, 2017)

It can be assumed that the Quality Policy is a way to shape customers' trust in the organization. The Quality Policy text will tell the customers how the organization operates and if it is likely to meet their expectations. Thanks to that, the Policy shapes a positive image of the organization in the customers' eyes and improves its credibility.

The reference works claim that the Quality Policy has an impact on many organization operations' aspects determining the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization quality-related strategies and the ultimate market success (Sułkowski, Wolniak, 2016). Another non-negligible aspect is the improvement function characteristic of companies having an effective QMS (Bugdol, Hajduga, 2023; Bugdol, 2018; Escrig-Tena et al., 2018).

In practice, the Quality Policy affects the structure and operation of the quality management system in the organization (Pacana, Ulewicz, 2020). In the simplest form, it affects the structure of its processes and formal as well as informal internal regulations adopted by the company which should be considered a concept of the Quality Policy implementation method. The implemented formal documents should be a basis for an actual manner of quality management in an organization (Ligarski, 2020; Mourougan, Sethuraman, 2017; Midor, 2013).

The Quality Policy should be reflected in the way of thinking, practice, and organizational behavior. Employees behave in a certain specific way and solve problems related to the insufficient product quality as per the actual expectations and attitudes of managers. In this context, the Quality Policy helps to shape the organizational culture (Miller, Wroblewski,

Villafuerte, 2014). To put it simply, it is a whole system of values, behaviors and artifacts that support the organizational development and that are shared by organizational community. The culture heavily oriented on quality is convergent with TQM philosophy (Sharma, Jain, Pruthi, 2013; Silva, Gomes, Lages, Pereira, 2014; Calvo-Mora, Pico'n, Ruiz, Cauzo, 2014; Chen et al., 2016).

The described practice resulting from the actual Quality Policy affects the actual condition of the organization and its results in the technical, economical, and market areas. The Quality Policy can also be assessed based on quality cost indicators which shape the ultimate financial result of the company. It is worth stressing as well that the customer satisfaction indicators stem from the adopted and implemented Quality Policy.

3. Research results in the implementation of Quality Policy

One of the determinants of Quality Policy is the independence of the senior management when it comes to policy establishment and implementation. It is no secret that the external authorities apart from imposing quality standards quite often also supervise and enforce them. During the research, the independence of an enterprise when it comes to creating Quality Policy was identified. The studied enterprises were classified into one of the following groups described in section 2 herein. Table 1 presents mean values of policy aspect assessment for all the analyzed companies.

Table 1.

Survey results for selected 10 Quality Policy aspects – mean values and standard deviations

QP aspect		Mean value [n=237]
#A1.	Degree of the Quality Policy determination and communication to employees by top management.	3,67
#A2.	Degree of Quality Policy implementation by top management.	3,61
#A3.	Degree of the management's decision making based on facts/reliable data and information.	3,62
#A4.	Degree of employee incentives relating to implementing the Quality Policy provided by top management.	3,08
#A5.	Degree to which the top management initiate activities improving the company and product quality.	3,52
#A6.	Degree of employees' knowledge of their obligations and responsibilities.	3,69
#A7.	Degree to which HR policy consisting in continuous employee qualification development is implemented.	3,07
#A8.	Degree to which the organization selects verified suppliers/partners to cooperate.	3,96
#A9.	Degree to which the organization cares for relationships with partners and suppliers.	3,77
#A10.	Degree to which every employee, regardless of their position, is respected in the organization.	3,41

Source: own study.

The study results of selected Quality Policy aspects in the form of arithmetical means obtained for all 237 companies can be found in Figure 1. For the studied companies, the highest-scoring Quality Policy aspects include:

- #A8 – degree to which the organization selects verified suppliers/partners to cooperate (3.96),
- #A9 – degree to which the organization cares for relationships with partners and suppliers (3.77) and
- #A6 – degree of employees' knowledge of their obligations and responsibilities (3.69).

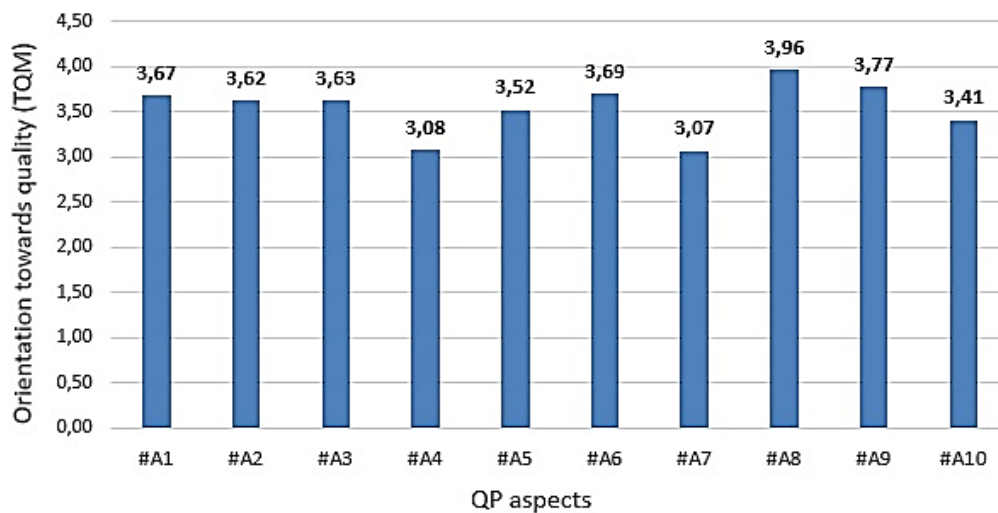


Figure 1. Rating for 10 selected Quality Policy aspects — mean values for all companies.

Source: Own study.

The lowest rating is received for the following Quality Policy aspects:

- A7 – degree to which HR policy consisting in continuous employee qualification development is implemented (3.07), employee involvement in improving their work place.
- A4 – degree of employee incentives relating to implementing the Quality Policy provided by top management (3.08).

The highest rating in the studied companies' group is awarded to the Quality Policy aspect of cooperation with suppliers, while the lowest one to the personnel management area.

4. Evaluation of Quality Policies among companies with different supervisory independence

One of the Quality Policy determinants can be the independence of Quality Policy development and surveillance of its implementation. The managers of companies subject to external authorities usually follow the imposed Quality Policy. In such companies, more intense supervision of the policy implementation can be observed, e.g. in the form of audits. During the studies, the independence of companies from any external management relating to the determination of quality procedures and standards was identified. The studied enterprises were classified into one of the following groups according to:

- full independence – procedures and standards of quality are determined by the management of the enterprise (group 1),
- national dependency – the procedures and standards of quality are determined by external national management (group 2),
- foreign dependency – the procedures and standards of quality are determined by external foreign management (group 3).

The analysis results presented in Figure 2 concern 237 companies for which the dependency form relating to the quality standard determination was identified. In three cases, the dependency was more complex. In the studied group of companies, 91 claimed full independence, 47 stated national dependency, and 99 declared their quality-related dependency on foreign management.

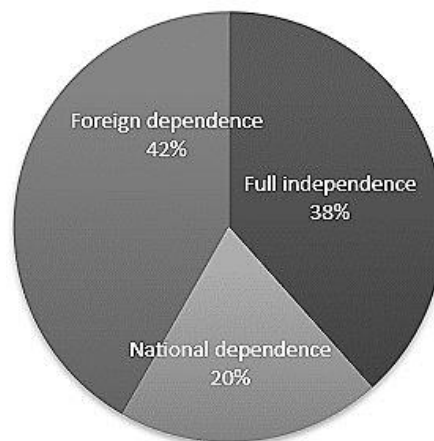


Figure 2. Structure of the studied companies due to the independence format.

Source: Own study.

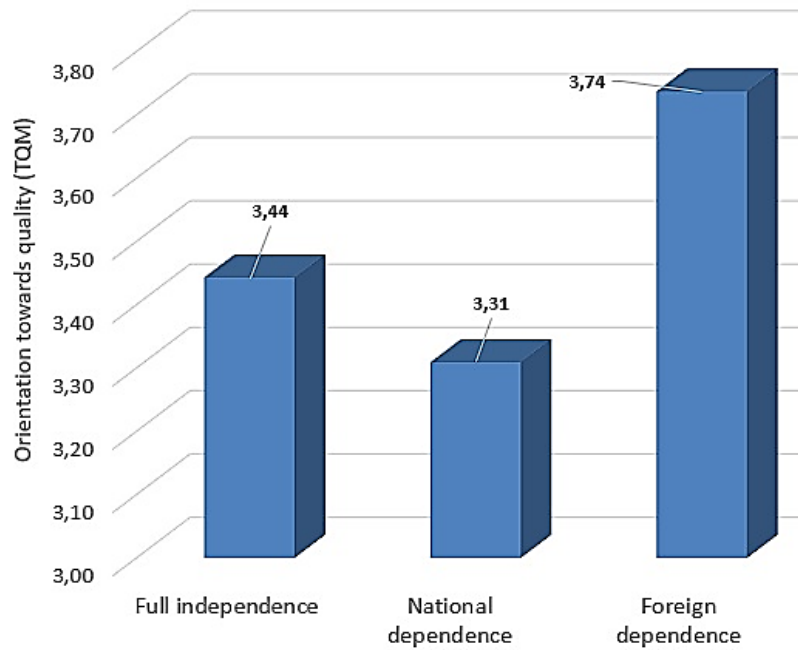


Figure 3. Comparing the quality focus in the studied group, divided based on independence of quality standard development.

Source: Own study.

Mean values of quality orientation for all the aspects in each group prove that the companies subject to foreign headquarters have the most quality-oriented policy (3.74 points). Independent companies obtained an average of 3.44 points. The least quality-oriented policy is followed by companies dependent on external headquarters in Poland (3.31). The results are presented in Figure 3.

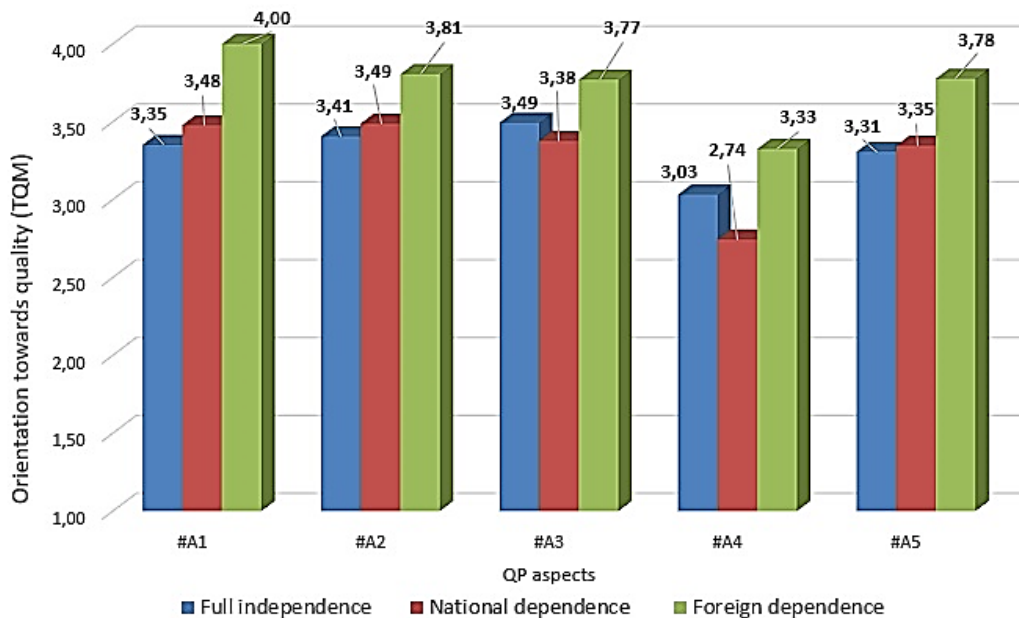


Figure 4. Comparing the quality orientation for aspects #A1 to #A5.

Source: Own study.

#A1 aspect – degree of the Quality Policy determination and communication to employees by top management is the aspect which is to show the top management's approach to the Quality Policy. The results in this respect show the significance of communicating Quality Policy as perceived by the managers. The best results are recorded for the “foreign dependency” group of companies. The “national dependency” companies achieved lower values, with the mean of 3.48. The lowest significance is attached to the Quality Policy in independent companies (3.35). Study results for #A1–#A5 aspects are presented in Figure 4.

The second aspect referred to studying the degree of Quality Policy implementation by top management. It depicts the managers' determination relating to the adopted policy implementation. Mean values in this range are highly convergent in all groups when compared to the first aspect. In this aspect, the approach to quality in companies with foreign standards received the highest rating as well.

#A3 aspect – degree of the management's decision making based on facts/reliable data and information presents the organization managers' approach to the quality management rule no. 6 (ISO 9000). This is the assessment of respondents from the middle organizational structure tier. The best results are obtained by the “foreign dependency” companies (3.77). In this aspect, independent companies achieved results slightly better than those belonging to the second group.

#A4 aspect – degree of employee incentives relating to implementing the Quality Policy provided by top management presents top-tier management's managerial activities aimed at motivating employees to follow the Quality Policy. For all the analyzed companies, this is one of the aspects with the lowest rating (see Figure 1). Group 3 companies received the best result, 3.33 points on average. The lowest rating in this aspect was received by group 2, i.e. “national dependency” companies.

An aspect characterizing the company quality orientation is the degree to which the top management initiate activities improving the company and product quality (#A5). The best orientation in this respect was observed for “foreign dependency” companies (3.78 points). Companies dependent on national headquarters recorded inferior results (3.35 points). Initiating improvement actions was rated a bit lower for independent companies (3.31 points).

In each quality-oriented company, a key role is played by the employees' knowledge of their obligations and responsibilities (#A6). The results of these aspect ratings are presented in Figure 5. These aspect ratings are most convergent and the best result differs from the worst by 0.14 points. Study results for #A6–#A10 aspects are presented in Figure 4.

#A7 aspect – degree to which HR policy consisting in continuous employee qualification development is characteristic of organizations oriented on personnel development. This is one of the aspects with the lowest score (3.07 points on average). The lowest mean value was obtained by “national dependency” companies (2.48 points). This is also the lowest score when you consider all the compared aspects.

Quality-oriented organizations should assess and select verified suppliers/supply partners. (#A8) assessment referring to the degree in which the organization selects reliable suppliers/partners is the aspect with the highest rating (3.96 points). This proves that this is one of the most important Quality Policy aspects for the analyzed organizations. The best results in this respect were observed for “foreign dependency” companies (4.13 points).

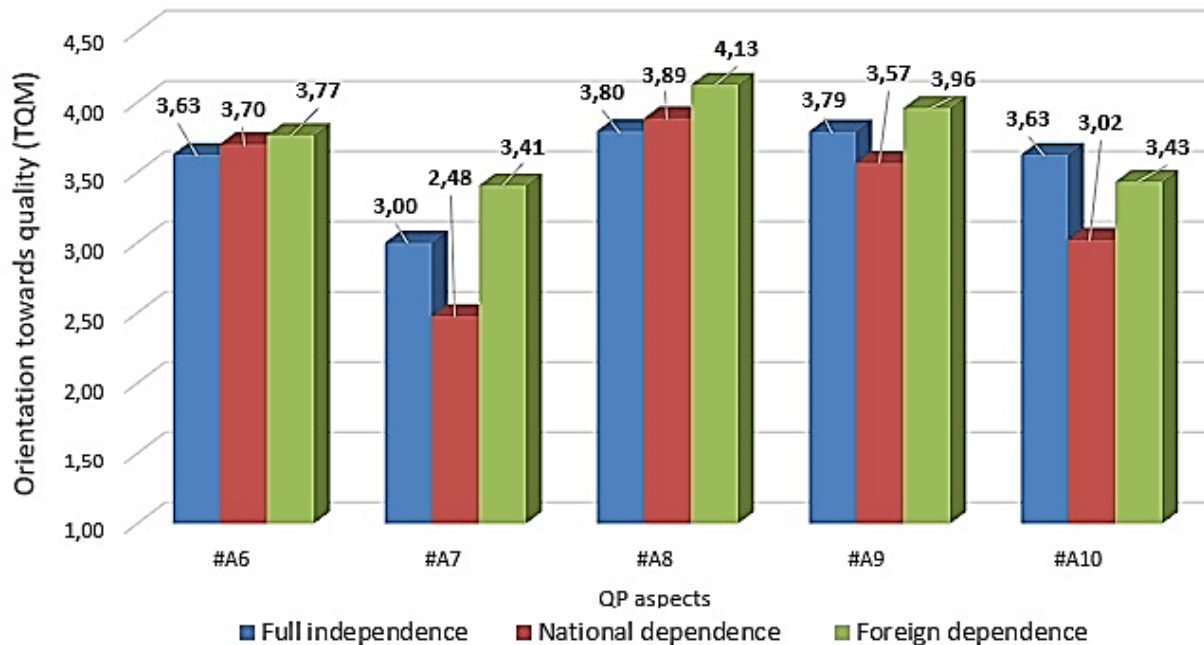


Figure 5. Comparing the quality orientation for aspects #A6 to #A10.

Source: Own study.

The company Quality Policy should be aimed at ensuring good relationship with business partners. Managing relationship with key suppliers is an end-quality determinant. #A9 aspect, i.e. the degree to which the organization cares for relationships with partners and suppliers, receives a bit inferior rating on average than the previous aspect. The lowest score was obtained by companies in the second group (3.57). “Foreign dependency” companies care for relationships with suppliers most (3.96 points).

The last aspect analyzed in this article refers to the Quality Policy in the social and cultural area. #A10 aspect refers to the degree to which all employees, regardless of their position, are respected in the organization. Interestingly, the best results in this respect (mean value of 3.63 points) were obtained by independent companies. This proves that the respect policy is best when there are direct relations with company authorities.

5. Conclusions

The impact of the Quality Policy declaration adopted by the top managers and its success relating to quality are significant, at least in theory. The Quality Policy should be a basis for establishing quality goals, developing process structure, and internal quality standards. It should also determine the actual quality management, managerial practices and employee behavior. As a consequence, it should determine the perception of the company on the market and the ultimate business success. The study results presented herein prove that the Quality Policy is most quality oriented in the supply management aspects, meaning the selection of verified suppliers/partners and taking care of good relations with suppliers/partners relating to supplies. Another area where companies get high score is the high level of employees' knowledge concerning their obligations and responsibilities. In close to every studied Quality Policy aspects, higher score was received by companies where the standards are imposed by foreign management boards. This is connected obviously not just with standards but also with the governance. The reasons for this should become a subject of further analyses. A certain potential can be observed for national companies relating to the foreign good practice implementation.

Foreign supervision of the surveyed group of domestic companies has increased their quality orientation. The results of the survey show that the best-rated aspect of the quality policy is (#A8) the aspect dealing with procurement processes, i.e. reliable evaluation and selection of the best suppliers. The policy has a strong focus on quality (3.96 points) in each of the considered groups of companies. The least targeted quality policy is in the area of personnel policy (#A7). Certainly, the continuous development of employee skills is not the strongest point of the surveyed companies. The average score for this aspect was 3.07 points.

Overall, it can be said that policies more focused on quality and TQM are observed in enterprises supervised by foreign power centers. High international standards and foreign supervision are the main reason for this. The largest differences between groups of enterprises were observed in aspect #A7 - personnel development policies. Enterprises supervised by foreign power centers scored 0.93 more than enterprises supervised by management located in the country. The smallest differences were observed in evaluations of aspect #A6 - the degree of employees' knowledge of duties and responsibilities. The difference between the studied groups is only 0.14 points. Regardless of the degree of independence, the policies are similar.

The findings highlighted the need for further research in the form of reasons for a stronger quality orientation among companies overseen by foreign boards.

It should be remembered that the group studied was not a survey sample. The values obtained are not estimators for the entire population of companies in Poland.

Acknowledgments

This article was prepared within the statutory research work symbol 13/010/BK_22/0065 performed at Silesia University of Technology, Faculty of Organization and Management, Institute of Economics and Informatics.

References

1. Bugdol, M., Hajduga, D. (2023) Possibilities of using quality management systems to undertake innovation activities in an organisation belonging to the chemical industry. *Scientific Papers of Silesian University of Technology. Organization and Management series, no. 172.* pp. 73-87.
2. Bugdol, M. (2018). *System zarządzania jakością według ISO 9001:2015.* Gliwice: Onepress.
3. Calvo-Mora, A., Pico'n, A., Ruiz, C., Cauzo, L. (2014). The relationships between soft-hard TQM factors and key business results. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management, vol. 34, no. 1,* pp. 115-143.
4. Chen, C.K., Lee, J.D., Dahlgard, J.J. (2016). A stepwise ISO-based TQM implementation approach using ISO 9001:2015. *Management and Production Engineering Review, 4,* 65-75.
5. Claver, E., Tari, J.J. (2003). Levels of quality management in certified firms. *TQM & Business Excellence, 14(9),* pp. 981-998.
6. Escrig-Tena, A.B. et al. (2018). The impact of hard and soft quality management and proactive behaviour in determining innovation performance. *International Journal of Production Economics, 200,* pp. 1-14.
7. Ligarski, M. (2014). Diagnosis of quality management system in Polish organizations - research results. *Problemy Jakości, vol. 46, no. 5,* pp. 14-22.
8. Ligarski, M. (2020). Study on disruptions in the quality management system in compliance with ISO 9001:2015. *Scientific papers of Silesian University of Technology Organization and Management Series, no.142,* pp. 195-204.
9. Midor, K. (2013). An innovative approach to the evaluation of a quality management system in a production enterprise. *Scientific Journals Maritime University of Szczecin, no. 34,* pp. 73-79.
10. Miller, J., Wroblewski, M., Villafuerte, J. (2014). *Kultura KAIZEN. Budowanie i utrzymywanie kultury ciągłego doskonalenia.* Warszawa: MT Biznes sp. z o.o.

11. Molenda, M. (2019). Assessment of chosen aspects of Quality Policy in selected industrial enterprises. *Scientific papers of Silesian University of Technology Organization and Management Series, no. 136*.
12. Molenda, M. (2015). Quality policy in the intelligent quality management system. *Management Systems in Production Engineering, vol. 5, no. 4*, pp. 219-224.
13. Mourougan, S., Sethuraman, K. (2017). Understanding and Implementing Quality Management System. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management, Vol. 19*, pp. 41-51.
14. Pacana, A., Ulewicz, R. (2020). Analysis of causes and effects of implementation of the quality management system compliant with ISO 9001. *Polish Journal of Management Studies, Vol. 21, No. 1*, pp. 283-296.
15. Pacana, A., Stadnicka, D. (2017). *Nowoczesne systemy zarządzania jakością zgodne z ISO 9001:2015*. Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Politechniki Rzeszowskiej.
16. Roszak, M. (2021). Doskonalenie systemu zarządzania jakością wsparciem doskonalenia organizacji. *Quality, no. 10*, pp. 32-33.
17. Sharma, P., Jain, N., Pruthi, K. (2013). TQM: Implementation, Scope and Myths - A Review. *Research Journal of Engineering Sciences, Vol. 2(6)*, pp. 40-44.
18. Silva, G., Gomes, P., Lages, L., Pereira, Z. (2014). The role of TQM in strategic product innovation: an empirical assessment. *International Journal of Operations & Production, vol. 34, iss. 10*, pp. 1307-1337.
19. Standard ISO 9001:2015. Quality management systems – Requirements.
20. Sułkowski, M., Wolniak, R. (2016). Przegląd stosowanych metod oceny skuteczności i efektywności organizacji zorientowanych na ciągłe doskonalenie. *Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej. Seria Organizacja i Zarządzanie, 67*, 63-74.
21. Wolniak, R. (2011). *Parametryzacja kryteriów oceny poziomu dojrzałości systemu zarządzania jakością*. Gliwice: Wydawnictwo Politechniki Śląskiej
22. Wolniak, R., (2021). Performance evaluation in ISO 9001:2015. *Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej. Organizacja i Zarządzanie, nr 151*, pp.725-734.