THE ROLE OF TENANT SERVICE IN HOUSING STOCK MANAGEMENT ON EXAMPLE OF CZESTOCHOWA INHABITANTS

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Abstract: Residential housing management is an important issue, primarily in the context of the social development of municipalities. Real estate management bodies are public, and their task is to meet the housing needs of various social groups. The level of realization of this task is determined by many factors. One of them is the quality of tenant service which represents the client's side. The aim of the paper was to assess the staff's approach to serving tenants. The research was based on the results of a survey conducted among employees of the housing management entity – Zakład Gospodarki Mieszkaniowej Towarzystwo Budownictwa Społecznego w Częstochowie Sp. z o.o. – ZGM TBS Czestochowa (Department of Housing Management, Social Housing Association in Czestochowa LLC). The data was analyzed using structure indicators. The obtained results showed a positive attitude of employees to tenant service, at the same time paying attention to the main problem, which is the limited time of individual customer service.

Keywords: tenant, housing stock, management, customer service, Czestochowa

Introduction

In managing housing stock, the key goal is to meet the housing needs of the local community, while the main group of beneficiaries should be the economically weakest inhabitants (O'Sulivan, Gibb 2003, p. 138). The competences of the commune in this respect are in Art. 7 of the Act of 8 March 1990 on municipal self-government, satisfying the collective needs of the community belongs to the commune's own tasks and in accordance with Art. 4 of 21 June 2001 on the protection of tenants' rights, the housing stock of a commune and the amendment of the Civil Code [i.e. Journal of Laws of 2016 Item 1610 with later amendments], where the legislator predicted that creating conditions to meet the housing needs of the local government community belongs to the municipality's own tasks (Paragraph 1), the commune, on the terms and in the cases provided in the Act, provides social housing and replacement premises, as well as satisfies the housing needs of low-income households (Paragraph 2).

With reference to the statutory regulation mentioned in the literature, it is rightly pointed out that the commune is one of the entities whose constitutional duty is to improve the housing situation of the local government community (Doliwa 2015).

Literature review

The management of a commune's housing stock can be carried out in one of three forms - housing stock management by employees of the commune office, housing stock management through municipal companies or other municipal organizational units, or entrusting the responsibility to a private entity (Dziadkiewicz, Cichowski 2017, pp. 49-50).

Regardless of the legal and organizational form of the property manager, it performs primarily a sociological function, which means "satisfying collective and individual needs of citizens resulting from social coexistence by pendent state organs and local self-government bodies" (Gierszewski 2012, p. 8).

An equally important goal is to counteract the phenomena of social exclusion and homelessness of the most economically disadvantaged group of inhabitants, which together with their co-existing crime and addictions are strongly connected with the security of the tenants' housing (Jadach-Sepioło, Jarczewski 2015, p. 381; Fehér, Teller 2016, p. 69). The role of the housing stock management entity is also to maximize the social welfare of dwellers living in the housing stock, as well as other residents of the commune, who necessarily interact with tenants and who usually occupy city centers (Aalbers, Van Loon, Fernandez 2017, p. 4; Priemus 2004, p. 3).

From the point of view of public administration, the sociological approach is perceived as a product of the collective life of people and the accompanying phenomena.

By adapting the administration theory in organizational terms, the management of the housing stock is based on (Gierszewski 2012, p. 8):

1. A formalized social group or a tenant community;
2. System structures inside the property manager;
3. A system of mutual relations.

The public mission established on this basis indicates that "the main task of the administration is to serve society and satisfy its needs by providing services of appropriate quality" (Rudzewicz, Michalak 2013, p. 96). In the case of a property manager, this task will be narrowed down to providing a flat that meets the requirements and needs of a given community. As in the administration, as well as in the management of the housing stock, the actions undertaken should be focused on satisfying the needs of social groups and perceiving tenants as customers (Lenkowsky, Perry 2000, p. 299). In this category, emphasis should be placed on the quality of services rendered, which imply actual changes in the life of the inhabitants of a given commune.

The concept of customer service

The very concept of customer service means "a lot of mutually coupled logistic activities, deciding on customer satisfaction when buying a product (service), i.e. the last act of the process, which usually starts with the order and ends with the delivery of the product to the customer" (Kempny 2001, p. 19). J. Grabowska (2013, p. 170) believes that this is "a set of activities aimed at meeting customer

expectations, specific standards of services provided or even as a customer-oriented philosophy of business management". What is more, this process is an information system that consists of a specific concept of relationship orientation, designated service standards, decisions to be made and methods of contact with the client (Dembińska-Cyran, Hołub-Iwan, Perenc 2004, pp. 36-37).

Maintaining an appropriate quality of customer service therefore requires, above all, continuous improvement of communication between the parties, which allows them to present certain values, meet expectations and build trust (*Figure 1*).
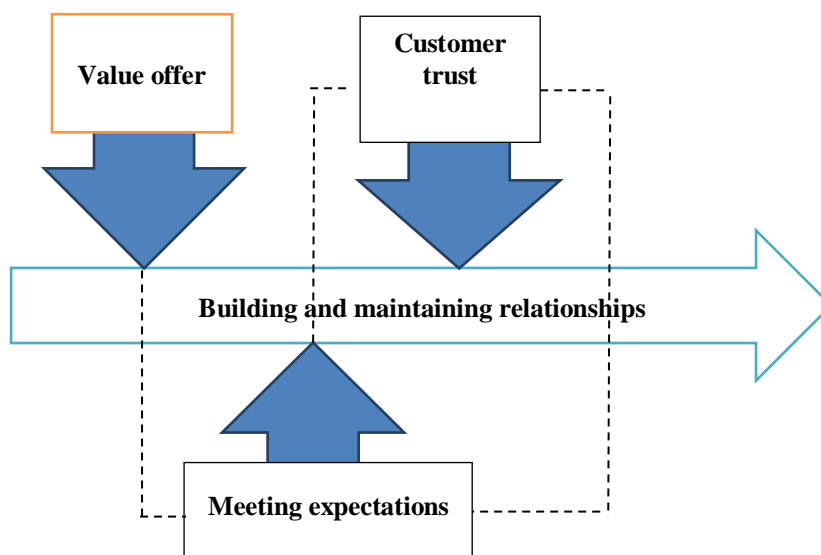

Figure 1. Customer service process

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on (Gegeckaite 2011, pp. 4-13)

At the same time, analysis of the subject theory presents customer service in the following dimensions (Sobczak-Matysiak 1997, p. 7):
– private, which focuses on customer service as a key factor stimulating a competitive position and increasing generated profits from business operations;
– public, where the success of the social and economic system of the whole country is conditioned by the public service of social units;
– public-private, where public and private interests are intertwined.

In each dimension, the essence of customer service is based on understanding the client's attitudes, emotions, behaviors, expectations and needs.

Housing stock customer service

Both the administration of the property manager and residents are involved in the management of the housing stock. Thus, the public dimension of customer service can be adopted, which takes place as a result of interaction between the interested parties. The quality of this service is conditioned by (Nalepka 2009, p. 38):

1. The structure and nature of the relationship between the residents of individual properties;
2. Accepted patterns, attitudes and behavior of residents;
3. The level of education and qualifications of residents and the resulting method of maintaining the property;
4. The form of ownership of the premises.

In the case of the housing stock manager, the customer service process is based on communication with the local community regarding the conditions of its operation and providing support to particularly excluded social groups. Paying attention to the needs of the entire community allows the housing stock manager to identify the values it promotes and thus more effectively establish positive relationships.

Customer service process in the selected research entity

Characteristics of the goal and research sample

Ensuring the proper quality of tenant service is largely due to the approach to the topic by the employees who provide such a service. Due to the aim of the research which was to evaluate the concept of serving housing stock tenants, a survey was conducted in a selected research entity (ZGM TBS Czestochowa) that manages housing stock. The target group was the employees of the company. The research sample is 55 people who participated in the study (over 80% of the whole population). The task of the survey was to evaluate the level of tenant service provided by ZGM TBS Czestochowa from the employees' perspective. The detailed structure of the research sample is characterized in *Table 1*.

Table 1. Cross-table of surveyed employees' age and work experience

Age	Seniority				
	Less than 5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	More than 20 years
20-30	2	2	0	0	0
31-40	8	8	1	0	1
41-50	3	2	1	1	8
51-60	1	0	1	0	16
Total	14	12	3	1	25

Source: Authors' own compilation

Among the surveyed employees, 41 were women (75% of the total). At the same time, regarding seniority, most employees have been employed in the company for over 20 years (25 people, which is 45% of the total), and their age range is from 51 to 60 years. A significant number of employees have been employed in the company for less than 11 years (47% of the total). Concerning age, employees over 40 (60%) predominate.

From the observations of the respondents, the results are (*Table 2*) that on average half of their daily work time is devoted to direct contact with the client, on which they usually spend about 14 minutes. During the working day, they effectively carry out, on average, 13 tenancy matters. At the same time, more than half of the employees (71%) declare that they have much less time to perform other duties, and most of these people lack sufficient time (60%).

Table 2. Selected indicators of tenant service

Customer service indicators	Percent of daily work devoted to serving tenants	Average number of served cases per day	Average time devoted to serving a single tenant
Average	49.5%	13 cases	around 14 minutes
Standard deviation	1	1.6	2.1

Source: Authors' own compilation

Employees' perception of tenant service process

There are some elements of customer service that determine its proper course (Tomaszkiewicz 2010, p. 8). They are: attitude, skills in interpersonal communication, possessed knowledge and personality traits of the employee. These components were evaluated in the research questionnaire.

The assessment of the employee's approach to customer service was preceded by gathering opinions on the approach to the duties performed by them (*Table 3*).

Table 3. Attitude of staff to performing their duties within framework of customer service

Questions	Yes %	No %
Do you have a positive attitude to your daily work?	96.4	3.6
Do you believe that you serve customers well?	100.0	0.0
Do you show initiative to take care of good relations with clients?	100.0	0.0
Would it be more beneficial for you to deal with matters over the phone instead of direct contact?	47.3	52.7
Would it be more beneficial for you to deal with matters online instead of direct contact?	52.7	47.3
Is the information provided by you usually sufficient for the client?	89.1	10.9
Do you inform your clients about the formalities to be met in order to settle the matter effectively?	92.7	7.3
Do you inform your clients about the approximate date of settling the case?	96.4	3.6

Source: Authors' own compilation

Almost all the surveyed employees are characterized by a positive attitude to their everyday duties. Each of them is convinced that she serves her clients well and has good relations with them. Nevertheless, half of them think that it would be more beneficial for them to settle some matters by phone (47.3%) or online (52.7%) instead of via direct contact. At the same time, according to the vast majority of respondents, the provided information is sufficient for the client, who is usually notified about the formalities for the issue to be effectively solved (92.7% of positive employees' opinions) and the approximate date of completion (96.4% of positive opinions). At the same time, every tenth case of customer service requires greater attention from employees.

Next, the evaluation was carried out on a four-level scale (where 1 and 2 meant a positive character of the assessment, while 3 and 4 - negative):

1. Attitude of the employee to the process of serving the tenant;
2. Interpersonal skills of the staff in communication with the tenant;
3. The impact of staff knowledge and competence on the tenant service quality.
4. Personality features of a tenant service employee.

The percentage structure of the share of individual ratings is presented in *Tables 4-7*. The average level of the assessment was also counted and calculated as the arithmetic average of the ratings for individual features of the studied elements of tenant service.

Table 4. Attitude of employee to tenant serving process

Statements	Definitely yes	Rather yes	Rather not	Definitely not	Average rating
	Data in %				
Timeliness of dealing with matters.	80.0	20.0	0	0	1.20
Completeness of service.	69.1	27.3	3.6	0	1.35
Reliability of service.	70.9	25.5	1.8	1.8	1.35
Speed of service.	63.6	34.5	0	1.8	1.40
Efficiency of service.	69.1	29.1	0	1.8	1.35
Competence.	74.5	21.8	3.6	0	1.30
The clarity of my explanations.	50.9	47.3	1.8	0	1.51
Reliability of my service.	60.0	36.4	1.8	1.8	1.45
Aesthetics of my appearance.	61.8	29.1	9.1	0	1.47
Individual customer treatment.	54.5	40.0	3.6	1.8	1.53
Respect for client's time.	52.7	40.0	7.3	0	1.55
Overall quality of my customer service.	65.5	34.5	0	0	1.35

Source: Authors' own compilation

Analyzing the features characterizing the employee's attitude to tenant service (*Table 4*), it is observed that the key in this process is respect for the client, an individual approach to his / her matters and the clarity of explanations provided by the employee. At the same time, it is difficult to identify such features that would not matter in the approach to the tenant. The physical appearance of the employee is only slightly the least important in the process of effective handling of matters.

Undoubtedly timeliness of the handled issues and the general competence of the employee affect the level of customer service (100% positive answers). Slightly less frequent but equally important is the speed and efficiency of service. The lowest impact on the level of service is, in turn, the occupied position of the employee and his personality traits (over 7% of negative responses). The interpersonal skills of the staff in communication with the tenant were based on the assessment of individual statements related to customer service on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 meant strong agreement and 4 strong disagreement (*Table 5*).

Table 5. Interpersonal skills of staff in communication with tenants

Statements	Strong agreement	Agreement	Disagree-ment	Strong disagree-ment	Average rating
	Data in %				
I like direct contact with clients.	23.6	61.8	10.9	3.6	1.95
Talking to clients is not a problem for me.	38.2	60	1.8	0	1.64
Talking with clients makes me feel stressed.	3.6	14.5	52.7	29.1	3.07
I feel that I am helpful and I help clients to solve their problems.	30.9	69.1	0	0	1.70
Persons in my position should be characterized by high personal culture.	43.6	5.5	1.8	0	1.58
I can control my emotions during contact with clients.	30.9	65.5	3.6	0	1.73
I cope well in stressful and crisis situations.	25.5	65.5	5.5	3.6	1.87
I inform clients about the course of the case throughout its duration.	32.7	58.2	9.1	0	1.76
I am willing to provide comprehensive information.	32.7	61.8	3.6	1,8	1.75
A person in my position must be polite to clients.	41.8	56.4	1.8	0	1.60

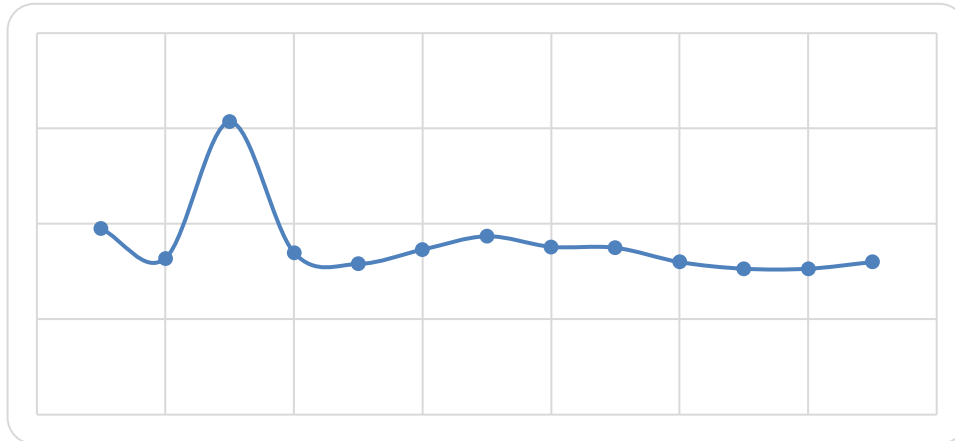|					
A person in my position should be pleasant, understanding and patient.	49.1	49.1	1.8	0	1.53
I always try to settle a given case.	47.3	52.7	0	0	1.53
I always try to settle a case with minimal negative effects for the client.	40.0	60.0	0	0	1.60

Source: Authors' own compilation

Figure 2. Average assessment of statements regarding interpersonal skills of surveyed employees

Source: Authors' own compilation

The average assessment of the individual statements presented in *Figure 2* varies from 1.5 to 1.9, which mainly means positive employee declarations in relation to customer service. The respondents are positive about contact with the client and help solve his problems, while providing comprehensive information. They cope well in crisis situations, being aware of the features necessary for direct communication with the tenant. At the same time, employees deny that customer service involves stress (3.07). The results of the obtained assessments prove that the employees are properly oriented towards customer service.

Then, according to the scale from 1 to 4 (where 1 meant definitely yes, and 4 - definitely not), they were asked to indicate how their knowledge and competences affect tenant service (*Table 6*).

Table 6. Impact of staff knowledge and competence on tenant service quality

Statements	Definitely yes	Rather yes	Rather not	Definitely not	Average rating
	Data in %				
Number of people working in the office.	58.2	23.6	16.4	1.8	1.62
My competences and experience.	69.1	38.2	0	0	1.31
The efficiency of my service.	61.8	38.2	0	0	1.38
Excellent knowledge of my job.	74.5	23.6	1.8	0	1.27
General competences.	69.1	30.9	0	0	1.31
My position.	52.7	30.9	12.7	3.6	1.67
Knowledge of law.	52.7	43.6	3.6	0	1.51

Source: Authors' own compilation

All the average ratings of statements regarding the importance of individual elements of customer service are in the range of 1.31 - 1.62. This means that the current knowledge and acquired competences according to the employees' opinions are of great importance when conducting negotiations and talks with the tenants. At the same time, the position held and the number of people working in the office that interact directly with the tenants have a major influence on this process. No less important is also the knowledge of the law in the field of housing stock management.

The character traits of the employee should also be assessed in order to provide the highest level of service (*Table 7*). The grading was made on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 meant definitely significant and 4 was definitely irrelevant.

Table 7. Personality features of tenant service employee

Features	Definitely important	Rather important	Rather unimportant	Definitely unimportant	Average rating
	Data in %				
Stubbornness	34.5	40.0	23.6	1.8	1.93
Patience	70.9	29.1	0	0	1.29
The ability to listen	80.0	20.0	0	0	1.20
Openness	76.4	18.2	5.5	0	1.29
Self-reliance	67.3	30.9	1.8	0	1.35
Amicability	45.5	38.2	16.4	0	1.71
Pessimism	10.9	23.6	29.1	36.4	2.91
Likeability	43.6	32.7	20.0	3.6	1.84

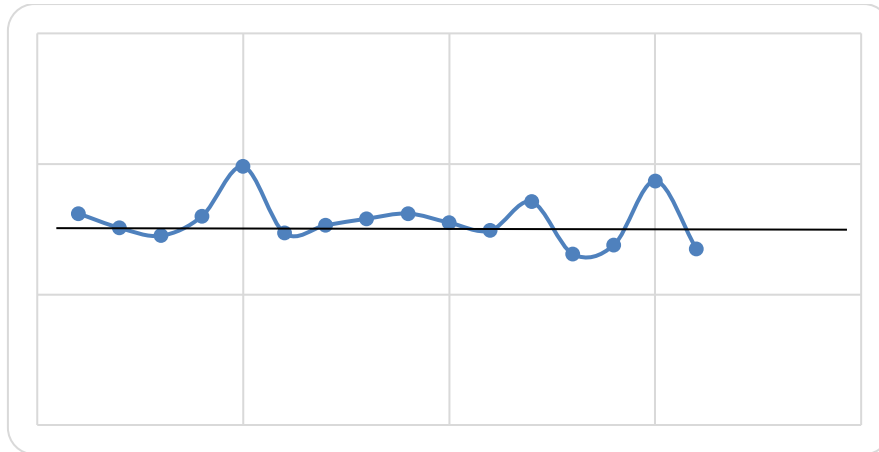|					
Professionalism	85.5	14.5	0	0	1.15
Optimism	61.8	32.7	5.5	0	1.44
Confidence	69.1	29.1	1.8	0	1.33
Creativity	76.4	23.6	0	0	1.24
Assertiveness	65.5	30.9	3.6	0	1.38
Empathy	49.1	38.2	12.7	0	1.64
Communicativeness	85.5	14.5	0	0	1.15
Aesthetic appearance	61.8	34.5	1.8	1.8	1.44

Source: Author's own compilation

Figure 3. Average assessment of ideal customer service employee characteristics

Source: Authors' own compilation

The assessment of the importance of individual character traits in the customer service process is highly diversified and ranges from 1.15 to 2.91 (*Figure 3*). According to the respondents' opinions, the most important are patience, listening skills, professionalism, solving problems and communicativeness (100% positive answers). Self-reliance and self-confidence are also important (over 98% positive indications). Employee pessimism (65% negative assessments) definitely does not help in customer service, and also stubbornness, agreeableness, sympathy and empathy towards the tenant are less frequent.

Conclusions

The conducted research shows that the employees of the company managing the housing stock are characterized by a positive attitude to their daily duties. Each of them is convinced that he serves his clients well and has good relations with them.

The respondents are helpful in solving client's problems, and provide comprehensive information.

According to employees, the most important elements of customer service are primarily the number of people working in the office, the clarity and transparency of provided explanations, employee reliability, an individual approach to the case and respect for the client's time. In the service process, the knowledge, acquired competences and experience of the staff are also important. The ideal customer service employee should have patience, listening skills, professionalism, creativity in solving cases and communicativeness. At the same time, some problems arise due to the high frequency of direct contact with the tenant. Every tenth of them requires greater attention from employees. The time gained from using the telephone and electronic communication tools to transmit simple messages could be allocated to solve more demanding and complex tenant matters.

A positive approach and the right perception of the tenant as a partner for the relationship build a positive image of the subject among the tenant community. The confidence gained among them influences the effectiveness of the communication process with regard to identifying and satisfying social needs and security. It also facilitates implementation of the housing policy and the social mission of the commune which is to raise the quality of life in the urban tissue, build a community of residents, prevent social exclusion, leading to sustainable development of the city, ensuring high economic, social and spatial standards for all residents and future generations. The obtained results will be used to further examine the service level from the perspective of tenants.

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ROLA OBSŁUGI LOKATORA W ZARZĄDZANIU ZASOBEM MIESZKANIOWYM NA PRZYKŁADZIE MIESZKAŃCÓW CZĘSTOCHOWY

Streszczenie: Zarządzanie zasobem mieszkaniowym stanowi istotne zagadnienie przede wszystkim w kontekście społecznego rozwoju gmin. Organy gospodarujące nieruchomościami mają charakter publiczny, a ich zadaniem jest zaspokajanie potrzeb mieszkaniowych różnego rodzaju grup społecznych. Poziom realizacji tego zadania determinowany jest wieloma czynnikami. Jednym z nich jest jakość obsługi lokatora, który reprezentuje stronę klienta. Celem artykułu jest ocena podejścia personelu do obsługi lokatorów. W badaniu posłużono się wynikami ankiety przeprowadzonej wśród pracowników podmiotu zarządzającego zasobami mieszkaniowymi – Zakład Gospodarki Mieszkaniowej Towarzystwa Budownictwa Społecznego w Częstochowie Sp. z o.o. (ZGM TBS Częstochowa). Dane przeanalizowano za pomocą wskaźników struktury. Otrzymane wyniki wykazały pozytywne nastawienie pracowników do obsługi lokatorów, jednocześnie zwracając uwagę na główny problem, jakim jest ograniczony czas indywidualnej obsługi klienta.

Słowa kluczowe: lokator, zasób mieszkaniowy, zarządzanie, obsługa klienta, Częstochowa