



INDICATORS FOR CLIENTS' SATISFACTION

The prospect of a service-oriented government, i.e. a situation where¹ “governments better anticipate citizens' needs, and (...) communicate more effectively with the citizens they are supposed to serve”, has become a pivotal element in public sector reform in China, all the more when this concept was explicitly endorsed during the works of the 17th Congress of the CPC.

Social security is indeed by nature a service-oriented institution, since its goal, mechanisms and evaluation are all centred on providing protection to those requiring its services. In the realm of social security, developing a service-oriented administration makes reference to a relatively new and challenging concept, that of clients' satisfaction.

Measuring the degree of societal satisfaction with social security was customarily done through statistical data such as average benefits income replacement ratio or the level of guaranteed livelihood. Clients' satisfaction implies assessing the efficiency and the legitimacy of social security administrations not only against their economic results impacting on the standards of living of beneficiaries, but also with reference to the quality of services accessible to its clients – namely, workers, employers and those in receipt of benefits.

Although a relatively recent concept, clients' satisfaction has become a key in modern social security administration in Europe and North America. While previously the main preoccupation of social security managers and tutelage departments was just to accurately deliver services, without paying too much attention to conditions presiding over this delivery, attention focus progressively evolved towards more qualitative concerns.

¹ OECD Report – Government of the Future, Paris 2000.



This evolution may be seen as the result of at least four factors:

- *complaints received* from “clients” who, as tax payers and contributors, felt they should be entitled to a reasonably efficient and considerate treatment from institutions they were more and more aware of financing and, to a certain extent, on which they felt they had ownership rights;
- improvements in *technical management* and upgrading of managerial processes, freeing (human and financial) resources for more upfront addressing quality requirements;
- *competitive challenges* posed by comparable institutions functioning in the private sector, such as insurance companies; and,
- general efforts to *reform government as a whole* and to make it more responsive to citizens’ expectations.

Indicators have subsequently been developed by social security institutions, specific to the various categories of clients (insured persons, beneficiaries and enterprises) and to the situations under which they resort to social security services (preliminary contacts; registration, benefits or contributions processing; after payment follow-up).

Typical information to be collected, either through direct sampling of workflows or via questionnaires distributed to “clients” would for example address the following preoccupations:

- How simple is it to be recognized as a “client” when approaching social security?
- How quickly does the social security institution respond to clients’ requests?
- How long does it take for a client to complete a submission and gather all required documents?
- How cumbersome are the processes imposed upon enterprises because of compulsory registration?
- How transparent is the record keeping process, and how satisfactory is the information made available to clients?



- How accurate is the process for computing benefits?
- How expeditiously are benefits being paid?
- How complex are after payment requirements?
- How reliable are periodic checks on entitlements?, etc.

The Chinese social security system is preoccupied with clients' satisfaction, at par with more ancient solidly established schemes functioning in highly developed countries. It appears however that the corresponding administrations are not yet equipped for adequately assessing and monitoring their performance in that respect, although sustainably achieving higher levels of clients' satisfaction may indeed directly impact on the levels and structures of dedicated social security human resources.

According to the experience gained abroad, and notably in the European context, there are at least four parameters which might facilitate an assessment of clients' satisfaction in a manner allowing for drawing operational conclusions, notably with respect to related requirements in the area of human resources development.

Those four key parameters are ***accessibility, equal treatment, professional approach*** and ***learning processes***.

- **Accessibility** notably refers to the density of implantation for social security offices, their vicinity to insured persons and beneficiaries, hours when services are open to the public, facilities for distance access including via actually operating phone contacts, etc.
- **Equal treatment for all** mainly expresses the fact that quality should not depend upon the type of service or the type of client, which indeed points to preference to be given to one desk facilities but also relates to respecting the specificities of some of the insured persons or beneficiaries, e.g. those little literate, those not in a position to visit social security offices during core opening hours, those with limited mobility, etc.
- **Professional approach** insists upon the fact that staff interacting with clients are indeed conversant with both technical subject matters they address, and with clients' main overall characteristics. Professional approach therefore directly



relates to the quality of human resources in social security and to the reliability of procedures that should minimize the risk of mistakes and benefit deceit.

- **Learning processes** specifically relate to the fact that social security institutions are expected to duly treat complaints received from clients and to act to redress the situations having led to such complaints. As a learning organization, social security should equally collect, process and monitor the required data for measuring clients' satisfaction, and may also wish to build and maintain a related aggregate index.

The table hereafter provides some examples of quality evaluation indicators that may be used both for establishing strategic targets for improving performance in individual schemes, and for subsequently appreciating, on the basis of corresponding workload, the related staffing needs.

Those indicators are presented according to the breakdown in the above four parameters – accessibility, equal treatment, professional approach, learning process. Although the table refers only to absolute numbers, it has to be noted that, once these numbers have been collected, it will be up to individual organisations to transform them into ratios which are the most significant elements for monitoring actual activity processes and results.

For example:

- The numbers of front desk staff represent a valid indicator when compared to the number of clients those staff are supposed to serve.
- The comparison of number of claims received with the number of claims treated over a given period of time provides an indication on how over staffed, understaffed or indeed appropriately staffed the benefits processing units of the Agency are.
- The number of inspections conducted derives its value from the total number of outside facilities which should in theory be visited (employers, hospitals, vocational training schools, rehabilitation centers, social care institutions, banks, tax authorities, etc.).
- The number of complaints filed has to be put in relation with the number of claims received and treated, that of targeted public relations campaigns with the number of outlets (enterprises, districts, streets, communities) to be serviced by a given administration, and so on.



Table 7
Selected Indicators
Clients' Satisfaction

AREA	INDICATOR	CORRELATE WITH
Accessibility	Nb. of social security offices	Distance from clients, public transports access, opening hours
	Nb. of front desk staff	Nb. of clients to serve, nb. of social risks (branches) to be addressed
	Nb. of clients received	Nb. of clients to serve, per category of client
	Nb. of communications received	Nb. of files treated, per type of communication
Equal Treatment	Nb. of claims received	Nb. of clients, nb. of staff handling claims
	Nb. of claims treated	Nb. of claims received, nb. of insured persons for related risk
	Nb. of claims rejected	Nb. of claims received – <i>to be positive, this indicator should show a negative trend</i>
	Nb. of post benefits requests handled	Nb. of benefits awarded or in award, nb. of beneficiaries
Professional Approach	Nb. of staff trained	Total nb. of staff – per job, per level. <i>Refers to prospective methods for human resources forecast</i>
	Nb. of staff in contact with clients	Nb. of clients, per type. Nb. of claims received or treated. Nb. of requests handled. Nb. of communications received
	Nb. of outside inspections	Nb. of outlets to visit per type (<i>hospitals, social care, vocational training, banks, tax authorities, enterprises ...</i>)
	Nb. of desk audits	Nb. of departments, sections, offices ... to be audited, nb. of complaints received
Learning processes	Nb. of quality reviews conducted	Nb. of social security offices, nb. of outside contact points for clients, nb. of enterprises
	Nb. of complaints received	Nb. of clients, nb. of benefit claims handled, nb. of communications received – <i>to be positive, this indicator should show a negative trend</i>
	Nb. of survey questionnaires received	Nb. of clients, nb. of benefit claims, nb. of questionnaires issued
	Nb. of public relations campaign launched	Nb. of outlets for contacting clients, nb. of enterprises registered, nb. of administrative units covered
	Nb. of statistical indicators monitored	Types of clients, types of beneficiaries, types of risks covered



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The global satisfaction index would otherwise document, notably out of questionnaires, the levels achieved in terms of clients' orientation (accessibility), efficiency (whether the expected results were achieved in the client's opinion) and swiftness (how quickly were such results attained).

Representation of clients' opinions through the global satisfaction index and its evolution over time would indeed supplement managerial and statistical data collected by the institutions, and contribute to adding a qualitative dimension to otherwise exclusively quantitative information.

It has to be added that since, in practice, Chinese social security administrations do not usually rely on indicators to gear and plan their activities, conducting clients' surveys may appear as a first, immediate way for identifying possible insufficiencies in daily managerial practice, which in turn may motivate managers to act upon the collection of the required data for establishing a proper management information system – which indeed will provide, as a by-product, the required data for staff workload estimates.

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