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Image of public administration and its changes

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IMAGE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND ITS CHANGES

Summary

The main problem posed in this paper is how the image of public administration is shaped in the eyes of its customers who in this case will be represented by Wrocław inhabitants selected using a quota sampling. The importance of the research is based on the fact that most offices don't conduct or commission image research. Further, the paper discusses theoretical issues connected with creating the image of public administration.

Keywords: image, organization, public administration, official, marketing

Introduction

Studies of the use of Public Relations in public administration conducted in Poland show² that most offices take activities in this area. This applies especially to government administration, but also to self-government administration at the level of a voivodeship and powiat. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of these tools is not always analysed through image research.

In this paper, public administration is addressed from a subjective perspective. This does not mean entering the realm of administrative sciences, but only allows one to define an "object" about which the surveyed express their opinions, toward which they have certain attitudes or which is perceived by them in some way. The subjective perspective will consist in equating public admini-

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² R. Przech, *Public relations w administracji publicznej w Polsce. Wyniki badań i perspektywy rozwoju*, www.proto.pl/PR/Pdf/art_rafal_przech.pdf.

stration with administration entities in general (with which the respondents had contact – highlighted by the author). This perspective is also known as organisational one.³ Thus, administration can be also treated here as an organization which is as a system isolated from the environment and maintains contacts with it (open system). It has got not only a direct and general external environment, but also an internal one. It has got its mission which stems from the subsystem of objectives, tasks and values of an organization.⁴ What seems to be also important here is the concept of an institution's identity, which represents the way it is perceived by itself, i.e. shows the mental picture that it expects its customers to create in the form of its image.⁵ Thus, administration which has a coherent image and a positive view of itself is much stronger, and customers will appreciate the sense of security and certainty about the way their matter will be handled. This poses a question of what is the image of public administration in Wrocław among its customers.

The aim of this analysis is also to indicate areas where the image of administration is positive and those where actions should be taken to improve it, as one of the basic objectives of an organization's image is to impact the way the organization is perceived by its environment.

Image is commonly understood as: a picture, subjective idea of phenomena, objects, people, countries, companies, material products and services, natural, social and economic phenomena.⁶ As research into the image of public administration only recently became an area of researchers' interests, the definitions and the operationalization of the concepts will mainly come from economic sciences and marketing, where the image of economic entities, i.e. enterprises, is analysed. It should be stressed that image is subjective, created in the processes of perception, so it is influenced by individual characteristics of the observer and does not have to be a faithful reflection of the reality.⁷ Most generally, image can be defined as what people think and what their ideas are about a company (in this case public administration). What will be also important for public sphere entities is the conception of an enterprise's image as a model de-

³ S. Cieślak, *Praktyka organizowania administracji publicznej*, Difin, Warszawa, 2004.

⁴ S. Wrzosek, *System: administracja publiczna. Systemowe determinanty nauki administracji*, Wyd. Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, Lublin 2008.

⁵ B. Iwankiewicz-Rak, *Tożsamość firmy*, w: *Leksykon public relations*, eds. J. Olędzki, D. Towrzydło, Rzeszów 2009, p. 168.

⁶ M. Biederman, M. Urbaniak, *Image – czynnikiem sukcesu firmy*, „Marketing i Rynek”, No. 11, 1998.

⁷ A. Talik-Orłowska, *Rola wizerunku w procesie dążenia przedsiębiorstwa do sukcesu*, „Świat Marketingu” 2003, http://www.swiatmarketingu.pl/index.php?rodzaj=01&id_numer=975894.

scribing the relations between the institution and people using its services or interacting with it.⁸ The main terms that will appear in the empirical research are connected with image understood here as: the idea of all the features of public administration (an official, office, a building, etc.), ways of interacting with customers, administration's efficiency and timely settlement of matters and trust to administrative authorities. This research is based on the analysis of a present image held by others (not own image), which places an emphasis on the idea held by administration's external environment, i.e. its customers at a given moment.⁹

An attempt to examine public administration's image is connected with a variety of social, economic, cultural and legal phenomena which public administration must "deal with", as it is always rooted in a certain social reality. Change and occurrence of certain situations always make it necessary to adapt the structures to them. What is interesting is not how the personnel of offices evaluate the adequacy, but how these transformations are evaluated by the respondents. Here, particularly valuable will be the responses of older respondents who have had experience both with "the old" and "the new" administration. The changing social reality concerns in this case a number of issues. Attention should be paid, among other things, to the transformation of the social, economic and political system of Poland after 1989.

The functions and role of administration had to change to adapt to the realities of civil society and a democratic state. Although the law defines an authoritative role of state administration toward its citizens, administration was forced to make citizens have more trust in administrative organs, ensure that the principles of the Administrative Procedure Code are followed, reduce pathological behaviour, and serve "administration customers" in a more efficient and diligent way. Additionally, the operation of administrative organs was influenced by Poland's entry into the European Union and the necessity of adapting their procedures to the technical and information development – which also led to, among other things, the amendment of some articles of the Administrative Procedure Code, i.e. regarding the possibility of online submission of applications to initiate legal proceedings (art. 63 §3a, Journal of Laws 1960 issue no. 30 item 168 with later amendments), etc.

⁸ T. Dąbrowski, *Reputacja przedsiębiorstwa tworzenie kapitału zaufania*, Wolters Kluwer business, Kraków 2010, p. 65

⁹ P. De Pelsmacker, M. Geuens, J. Van den Berg, *Marketing Communications*, Prentice Hall, 2001, p. 16.

Method and scope of own research into the image of administration

The research “The image of administration and changing social reality” was conducted in June and July 2010 using an interviewer questionnaire with a high degree of standardisation. This paper analyses only the hypotheses connected with the image of administration due to a small amount of research conducted in Poland in this area and interesting results of statistical analyses. The questionnaire also included questions concerning other issues, i.e. attitudes, opinions, actions of an administrative organ.

300 residents of Wrocław, of the overall number $N = 543797$ of people aged over 15, participated in the research. The number N signifies all the residents of Wrocław who answered the age and education questions of the General Census – thus, it doesn't include the 2% of the residents whose age or education has not been established (invalid answers).

The respondents had attained the age of 18 at the time the research was conducted (it was one of the conditions for starting the interviewer questionnaire). This fact is crucial as one has to have a full capacity to act in law in order to settle matters in offices (except the emergencies). During the selection of the sample, the age, gender, education and place of residence (the region of Wrocław) was controlled.

Type of matters, office and how long it takes to settle the matter as elements of the image

The research has a little different character than the research activity generally connected with the image of administration, which mainly consists in analysing individual organs or officials from the point of view of the respondents' answers given in such offices.

The aim of these analyses was also to identify where respondents settle matters most often, and the starting point in the research was the question about the matter that was last settled in an office.

The biggest number of respondents had recently contact with the Municipal Office (over 30%) and the Tax Office (over 27%). Under the „other” category, respondents often wrongly named the Post Office, which is confused with an administrative organ, probably due to the name and manner in which matters are handled there. In the offices indicated, respondents most often settled tax matters (over 20%), matters related to the issue of personal documents (accumulated percentage of the identity card and passport issue category) – 17.1%.

The image of administration is shaped by a number of elements that impact and create it as an idea in the consciousness of its customers. Thus, among other things, such factors as efficiency and timely settlement of matters by administration are important. In this case, efficiency in a universal sense can be equated with effectiveness, cost effectiveness, rationality, timeliness, taking into account each value of a good work¹⁰ individually.¹¹ In this situation, efficiency is characterized by practical values understood praxeologically. This issue seems to be important from the point of view of the social perception of administration, in a general sense, as a bureaucratic organization with intricate and complicated procedures.

This research shows that in most cases (after adding up the answers definitely yes and rather yes) respondents have claimed that administrative organs operate efficiently. Almost 86% of the respondents share this opinion. This is a very important result in terms of the operation and image of administration, as it shows positive changes in this respect. As far as dissatisfaction is concerned, the biggest number of respondents is dissatisfied with the efficiency with which matters are handled by the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) – over 50% of respondents have answered that their matter was handled definitely inefficiently and rather inefficiently. It will be then interesting to see further analysis which will provide the answer to the question of why respondents claim that the Social Insurance Institution handles matters in a way that doesn't suit them. This is also the office, where the number of those satisfied is significantly lower – 12%.

Second in the category of negative perception is the Municipal Office where over 40% of respondents have claimed that their matter was not handled efficiently enough, but at the same time almost 70% was satisfied with the effectiveness of this office's activities, which in a sense defends the image of the Municipal Office of Wrocław.

The efficiency of an office is defined by, among other things, how long it took to settle the matter with which a respondent came to the office. So, in the first stage respondents were asked how long it should take to settle a matter. Naturally, the majority chose the first two answers, although more (almost 40%) think that it should take an administrative organ 2 days to one week to settle a matter, probably realizing that in some cases it is impossible to complete a proceeding in one day, both for formal and technical reasons. Only less than 10% accept that an office should have from two weeks to a month to settle mat-

¹⁰ T. Kotarbiński, *Traktat o dobrej robocie*, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1982.

¹¹ T. Pyszczolowski, *Organizacja od dołu i od góry*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1984.

ters, which is in line with the existing provisions of the Administrative Procedure Code.

In order to answer the question asked earlier about the negative perception of the efficiency of the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS), among other things, in the next stage respondents were asked about how long it took to settle their last matter.

After analysing the data above we should conclude that the efficiency of an office is not always defined and determined, in the opinion of respondents, by how long it took to settle the matter. Respondents that negatively evaluated the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) in terms of efficiency mostly settled their matter immediately (over 53%) or within 2 days to one week (over 33%), so administration's efficiency in terms of the image is something else than the time needed to settle the matter, although it should be noted that the biggest number of respondents (almost 7%) indicated the time category "from over a month to two months".

What's interesting, there are cases when matters are settled in offices within over 2 months. Matters were settled the fastest (immediately) by respondents in the Labour Office – almost 70%. This should not come as a surprise given the character of the matters with which respondents usually come there (registration of an unemployed person). We can state that as far as the matters settled by respondents are concerned, the offices comply with the time limits provided by the Administrative Procedure Code, and almost half of the matters were settled by the respondents within one day.

Attitude to public administration – the image of an office and official in the mind of the residents of Wrocław

The image of administration is also determined by the organization, appearance and settlement of the building and the office's environment. Therefore, respondents were also asked about the important features shaping this image and, if applicable, when they last settled a matter in the office. Generally, this image looks positive. In all the cases, positive answers exceeded 70%. Most reservations concern the organization of customer service and the facilities for the disabled. Part of the image of administration is also the way the employees of these institutions are perceived. The questions used Osgood's semantic differential scale, which reflects the image of the research subject (in this case, the employees of offices who were treated here as a marketing object) implanted in the mind of the respondent. The analysis of these scales allowed us to learn

about the opinions held by the respondents and – the stereotypes often created by the media.

By crossing the threshold of an office, the customer has to confront an official. An official complying with the PR guidelines should show a good knowledge of local problems and know how to plan the actual settlement of the matter with which the customer comes. Additionally, he/she can support the customer not only on the legal plane, but also on the purely humane, social one, being at the same time a well-mannered man. All of this should lead to establishing a dialogue with the society. Such a model is however prevented by too bureaucratic procedures and physical and technical operations of administration. In this case, only a competent and empathic official, according to Z. Knecht, can contribute to the improvement of the image of public administration without necessary changes being made to the law.¹²

In this research, the characteristics of office employees were placed in the scalogram in two opposite terms (e.g. competent and incompetent, honest and dishonest) and the respondents were asked to indicate the point where they would place the employee's characteristic (the point that best represents the opinion). The employees of administration with whom the respondents last had contact are evaluated in a generally positive way, according to the characteristics attributed to them. The respondents claim that the officials were nice, spoke in a language that was understandable to them, and knew about the legal regulations. Their honesty was also evaluated as quite high, although further analysis shows that the respondents evaluated only the honesty of the official they last had contact with, and it is not the view of the whole social category, as according to more than half of the respondents officials have tendencies to accept financial benefits for settling a matter.¹³

This conclusion confirms a very strong impact of the media on the citizens' opinions related to the image of public administration. We can draw here a parallel between this and the efficiency of administration, because as it was stated above, there is a difference between personal experience and evaluations of a given phenomenon occurring in administrative organs. It is also confirmed by A. Kubiak in his report from the research into corruption where he says: "The views of the corruption in the world of politics and generally of a widespread

¹² Z. Knecht, *Public relations w administracji*, C.H. Beck, Warszawa 2006, p. 46.

¹³ A. Perchla-Włosik, *Postawy wobec administracji publicznej we Wrocławiu w świetle badań własnych*, materials from the conference Sociology of administration. In statu nascendi?, Siedlce-Chlewiska, October 2010 – submitted to be printed.

corruption in Poland are mainly based on media reports, statements of public persons, presentations of individual parties' views. They are rarely anchored in the respondents' personal experiences of corruption".¹⁴ The public opinion survey conducted on a Polish nationwide sample shows that people who are most prone to corruptive behaviour are: political activists, councillors, deputies and senators (44%), health service (58%), followed by the officials of central administration organs (31%), courts and public prosecutors (30%) and local commune, powiat and voivodeship offices (25%).¹⁵ Wrocław respondents' opinions about the propensity for accepting financial benefits concerned administration staff are generally alike. So, the harsher view of the issue of corruptive behaviour is likely to have been extended here not only to the officials "at the counter" with whom the respondents dealt most often, but also to the persons fulfilling the highest functions in the state that appeared in A. Kubiak's research in the category of deputies and senators, party activists, councillors.¹⁶

One of the latest survey by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS),¹⁷ conducted between 8 and 9 April 2010, shows even greater intensity of negative perception of the researched social categories in the context of corruption than in 2008. In this survey, party activists, deputies, senators and councillors obtained the result of 60%, health service – 58%, commune, powiat and voivodeship offices – 31%, courts and prosecutors – 29%, and central offices and ministries – 26%. These results confirm Poland's position on Corruption Perceptions Index, created annually by Transparency International, where in 2010 Poland came 21st among all European Union countries. Behind Poland were Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Italy, Romania and Greece.¹⁸ What's interesting, back in 2006 our country closed the list of the EU

¹⁴A. Kubiak, *Program przeciwko korupcji. Barometr korupcji 2007. Raport z badań*, Fundacja im. Batorego, Warszawa 2008, p. 7.

¹⁵ The report presents the results of the research into corruption conducted in December 2007. The research is commissioned by the Stefan Batory Foundation's Anti-Corruption Program and conducted by the Public Opinion Research Center. It is repeatable, making it possible to compare the intensity of corruption phenomena in the public opinion in the next years. The Polish nationwide sample of 870 people.

¹⁶ A. Kubiak, *Program...*, p. 4.

¹⁷ Report from the research by the Public Opinion Research Center: the answers were given by 1056 adult inhabitants of Poland.

¹⁸ The closer the score of 10 points, the "cleaner" the country according to the terminology of Transparency International. In 2010 Poland scored 5.3 points; the research conducted in 2010 confirms the improvement in the perception of corruption over the recent years. Source: CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX 2010, http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010/results, March 2011, p. 11. The comparative research has been conducted by Transparency International since 1995. However, it is not an objective indicator, but only a specific opinion

countries with the worst CPI – 3.7 point. It should be however stressed that the author’s own research uses the term “propensity for accepting financial benefits (which the Penal Code describes as venality of officials – accepting a bribe or protective payment)”, which constitutes only an element of the phenomenon and concept of corruption. Thus, the results of these pieces of research cannot be reliably compared, also due to the fact that this research was “local”.

According to the respondents, the image of public administration could be best improved through advertising in the media and websites (see tab. 1). As was mentioned above, the internet is now the best source of information about administration activities and can be used to create a positive image of administration.

Table 1

Sources of improvement of the image of public administration

Types of sources	Percentage
Media advertising	37.31
Websites	34.72
Press conferences	3.63
Actions of public relations officers establishing contacts with the media	9.33
Other	15.03
In total	100.00

Source: own research.

Perception of changes in the image of administration after the year 1989

As was mentioned earlier, as far as the changes in the perception of administration are concerned, the answers of older respondents who dealt with public administration before and after 1989 are important. The research shows that most respondents notice the changes that occurred in administration’s activities connected with customer service. According to the respondents, officials became more competent – over half of them think so; and the other characteristics of officials also improved – this is the view of over half of the respondents.

Only 14% of the respondents aged over 55 claim that officials are now more prone to accept bribes than before the systemic transformation. We can see here a significant change in the attitude to corruption phenomena compared with the beginning of the transformation period in Poland when the emphasis on the negative phenomena in the media (both actual and fictitious ones) in the post-

socialist reality led to the view of direct connection between these pathologies and the process of transformation. This phenomenon was described by Leszek Balcerowicz as the “effect of visibility”. In countries such as Poland it was more intensive than in mature democracies as the audience was subjected for several dozen years to the success propaganda covering up the negative elements of social life.¹⁹ This can be confirmed by the data from 1993 where 56% of the surveyed shared the opinion that the transformation taking place in Poland created favourable conditions for the growth of corruption.²⁰ The growth of corruption could have been perceived here as a process which concerned rather the officials at the highest state positions, which is confirmed by the Polish nationwide survey cited above, and not the officials “at the counter” about whom the respondents were asked in the author’s own research (see tab. 2).

Table 2

Perception of changes in the operation of administration after 1989 – change type

Change type	Percentage of indications
They are more competent	51.9
They are nicer	49.0
They are more helpful	48.1
They are more diligent	40.0
They accept bribes more often	14.0

Source: own research.

According to A. Kojder, the period before 1989 saw corruption occurring at a relatively small scale as this phenomenon could have been perceived at that time as a kind of “resourcefulness”.²¹ The process of changing the mentality, working style, and ways of decision making is very difficult. So, officials are still perceived through the prism of the old political system. We should also add here the pathologies characterising administration in general. These irregularities may result both from the structure and operations of administration. In the first case, pathologies may be caused by an inappropriate creation or transformation of administrative structures due to the activity of certain political forces which during establishing regulations on the system of public administration

¹⁹ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie masowe a demokratyzacja systemu politycznego*, in: *Współczesne systemy komunikowania*, ed. B. Dobek-Ostrowska, Wyd. Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 1997, p. 75.

²⁰ *Opinie na temat korupcji*, OBOP, April 1993, p. 3–5; *Zmiany w potocznym obrazie korupcji*, TNS OBOP, September 2003, p. 6.

²¹ A. Kojder, *Godność i siła prawa. Szkice socjologiczno prawne*, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2001, p. 381–383.

often treat individual parts of administration instrumentally, introduce solutions that do not ensure correct performance of public tasks but serve particularistic interests. This phenomenon is a manifestation of the privatization of the state.²²

The second kind of pathologies resulting from administration actions can be internal and then irregularities appear in the sphere of decision making (improper use of the organizational and material potential of the state or local government), or external when the pathologies are related to negative phenomena in the administration's contacts with the environment. Here, the most harmful and at the same time the most known – stressed by the author – phenomena include corruption and lack of competence as well as inappropriate treatment of citizens, e.g. arrogance of public officers.²³

The literature of the subject also stresses that the primary, original source of pathology are mainly legislative errors which lead to its secondary symptoms, i.e. lengthiness of proceedings, officials' low ethical and moral standards, and low level of their salary, which may lead to, among other things, corruption.²⁴

As A. Korzeniowska-Polak notices, the types of irregularities are also reflected in the subject of the complaint²⁵ which, according to art. 227 of the Administrative Procedure Code, may be negligence or improper performance of tasks by the relevant organs or their employees, violation of the legality or interests of complainants, as well as lengthy or bureaucratic settlement of matters. The author suggests that the statistical data of the number of complaints submitted to administrative organs should be used as the source of information about the degree of contemporary pathology in the operation of administrative organs and their employees. In the summary of her analyses she writes: "The statistical data shows a continuous huge popularity of this most available legal measure used to express one's dissatisfaction with the way public administration functions in Poland. A huge number of complaints are constantly filed with, among other things, the organs granting all kinds of social assistance, organs dealing

²² J. Boć, *Kadry*, in: *Administracja publiczna*, ed. J. Boć, Kolonia Limited, Wrocław 2003, p. 291.

²³ J. Izdebski, S. Wrzosek, *Rola nauki administracji w identyfikowaniu patologii w organizacji i funkcjonowaniu administracji publicznej*, in: *Patologie w administracji publicznej*, eds. P. Suwaj, D. Kijowski, Wolters Kluwer business, Warszawa, 2009, p. 809; *Urzędnik państwowy w oczach obywatela*. Report from the research by PBS for the Office of the Civil Service, Sopot, September 2005.

²⁴ J. Dembczyńska, *Skąd patologia w działaniach administracji? (pierwotne i wtórne przyczyny powstawania patologii w administracji)*, in: *Patologie w administracji publicznej...*, p. 40.

²⁵ A. Korzeniowska-Polak, *Źródła informacji o patologiach w administracji*, in: *Patologie w administracji publicznej...*, p. 818.

with the problems of unemployment and employment and organs for nature and environment protection, tax organs, and organs for architecture and construction or construction supervision.

The problem faced by the organizational units of administration is thus finding a form of customer service that is acceptable to the both sides and will be at least at the same level as in the countries of „the old” European Union. We should bear in mind that the citizens’ expectations will always depend on their personal interests, and next social and political ones. Moreover, public administration must deal with increasing polarisation of the society, with well-educated people at the one end, and those who can’t manage in the „clerical” reality at the other end.²⁶

Summary

The research shows that individual experiences are something else than the vision of administration established in the mind of individuals. In the light of the research, the customer’s personal contact with administration is not as negative as one would expect. In most cases the respondents claim that offices operate efficiently (which doesn’t always mean in their opinion fast). They usually settle matters on time within the timeframe established by the Administrative Procedure Code.

The image of administration determined by the organization, appearance and plan of the buildings and the office environment also looks positive. It is applied to the officials with whom the respondents dealt recently. Despite that, the respondents see the necessity of change in the mentality of public administration staff which should involve effective actions to create a “friendly administration”, rather than only media concentrated actions. The answers to the questionnaire questions show that personal relations with administration are no longer so negative, although the respondents see the need for improvement in many spheres of the organs’ operation. What is important, older people who dealt with administration before the year 1989 perceive the changes as positive in many aspects of administration’s operation.

The research confirms a very strong influence of the media on citizens’ opinions about the image of public administration, with a difference between personal experiences and evaluations of a given phenomenon occurring in administrative organs. This mainly concerns the analyses of the research results connected with the issues of administration’s efficiency and propensity for ac-

²⁶ Z. Knecht, *Public relations w administracji*, C.H. Beck, Warszawa 2006, p. 190.

cepting financial benefits. The research confirms the fact that perceiving officials as corrupt is strongly established in the mind of Polish people, although it does not have to result from individual experiences.

The respondents see the possibility of improving the image of administration, mainly by means of websites, which confirms that PR activities in this area should be continued because they are the most effective. The image of administration, especially governmental, central one, is created mainly by media covered scandals, not promotional actions of administrative organs at the self-government level with whom the "customers" deal most often. The role of the media is also crucial for the image of individual officials. This could have been especially seen in the analyses of the images of the President and the Voivode in the situation of the flood in May 2010. In the first case, the person is known, conspicuous and perceived as rather positive. In the second case, it is difficult to specify the results due to the fact that the respondents do not recognize the Voivode.

It is also important to note that the image of public administration is shaped not only through the direct or indirect contact of the official with the client, but also through a range of other actions, e.g. connected with reducing the occurrence of pathological phenomena resulting mainly from legislative errors.

WIZERUNEK ADMINISTRACJI PUBLICZNEJ I JEGO ZMIANY

Streszczenie

Głównym problemem postawionym w artykule jest kształtowanie się wizerunku administracji publicznej w oczach jej klientów, których w tym wypadku reprezentują dobrani kwotowo mieszkańcy Wrocławia. Istotność badań polega na tym, że zdecydowana większość urzędów nie prowadzi ani nie zleca badań dotyczących wizerunku. Ponadto w artykule omówiono kwestie teoretyczne związane z kreowaniem wizerunku administracji publicznej.

Słowa kluczowe: wizerunek, organizacja, administracja publiczna, urzędnik, marketing

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