

Tehy – The Union of Health and Social Care Professionals COMMENTS
P. O. Box 10
FI-00060 TEHY
Finland
2011-12-09

EPSU

COMMENTS ABOUT THE PRODUCTIVITY PAPER AND THE FINNISH TRANSLATION

THE FINNISH TRANSLATION

1. The Finnish translation is rather difficult to read, because of long words and long sentences. This is a common problem for translations and might be difficult to change.
2. As translation for “outcome(s)” the word “lopputuloks” is used in the text. In this context one should rather use the word “Vaikuttavuus”. This is generally used e.g. in health economics.
3. In the section about problems with public sector productivity the translation “suorituskyky” is used for “capacity”. In our opinion this is a bit misleading. A better translation would be “kapasiteetti”.

THE CONTENT

1. The examples of tangible goods for which productivity is easy to measure are not well chosen. Both cars and computers differ widely in quality and performance. Moreover, there are often changes in these from one year to the next. What this means for the productivity change is usually unclear and difficult to evaluate. A better example would be some simple product for which quality and specifications do not change over time.
2. About the problem with prevention in the section “The problems of measuring public sector productivity”, we claim that the problem is not exactly what the authors claim. Rather it is that an even better outcome can be achieved with less resources, when they are used for prevention. However, pre-emptive activities are often not measured or valued too low. This underestimates the value of prevention, although it would be essential to allocate more resources to it to reduce costs and improve outcomes. This problem distorts the view of decision makers.
3. Similarly a problem for productivity measurement arises due to that production (e.g. health services) can fill the same function, although the production processes and output

are very different in different organizations. This complicates comparisons. This is why it usually is better to consider outcomes rather than output.

4. About the problems with measuring output we would use outcome indicators rather than quality indicators for the mentioned indicators used by ONS. Quality is less precise and may often mean characteristics that do not really influence outcomes that much, like a friendly and smiling personnel.
5. This applies more generally. In general, the claim that quality measurement is the difficult thing about public sector is somewhat misleading, because quality is a wider concept. Rather the difference is that the outcomes are of great importance for many services provided by the public sector and that the citizens are not able to judge these or are at least not able to condition any payment on them (A patient visiting the doctor is probably unable to judge the doctor's ability to handle the illness. The patient is more likely to pay attention to some other quality issues like waiting time and the manner of the doctor. These might be less influential on the outcome.).
6. The paper could emphasize the role of management more. It is important that the management is able to listen to employees and take their experiences into account. This might imply that education on these topics is important not only for union representatives, but also for managers. Understanding the processes by listening to the employees better enables the managers to improve processes and the workers' satisfaction.
7. It could be useful to give some examples about the measurement problems, the choice of what is being measured, and how the outcomes and employees' wellbeing are taken into account with different approaches.

9 December 2011

Jaana Laitinen-Pesola
President

Marja-Kaarina Koskinen
Director, Development Unit

Expert / More information:
Kenneth Snellman
Economist / Officer
kenneth.snellman@tehy.fi