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A Simple, Fair, and Fast Service for Every School: Standards, Processes, Accountability

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Abstract
This paper analyses the work of the Secondary Education School Committee of the Municipality of Thessaloniki. It outlines challenges commonly encountered by School Committees—multiple requests, fragmented responsibilities, and delays—and presents the approaches, solutions, and innovations implemented. Through a concise international review, it also describes typologies in management and accountability systems (participatory, board-based, and mixed schemes) and organizational models of technical support (intra-municipal, trust/board-based, shared governance) that operate via standardized request-servicing procedures with clear prioritization criteria based on risk assessment and the preservation of critical functions. In the case of Thessaloniki, the paper presents the full request lifecycle (from submission to completion and payment) and the operation of a digital tool designed to establish a standard sequence of actions and alignment with ISO 9001—explicitly noting that full compliance is in progress. The proposed improvement is grounded in ISO 9000/9001 principles and the PDCA cycle. The steps toward standardization include mapping existing procedures to ISO 9001 (8.2, 8.4, 8.5/8.5.6, 8.6–8.7, 9, 10) and subsequent actions concerning maximum service times, institutionalized controls, linkage with accounting, an asset register/preventive maintenance, and an annual internal audit program. Overall, each school's request is transformed into measurable value for a safe and high-quality learning environment, while transparency and accountability are strengthened through standardization and documentation.

Keywords
Municipality of Thessaloniki School Committee; ISO 9000

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to clearly articulate the issue of servicing school requests in order to ensure their smooth operation while safeguarding the health and safety of students and staff. The constant need for maintenance, the large volume of requests from school units, fragmented roles, and the often-slow decision–execution chain generate backlogs and dissatisfaction. To address these issues, the School Committee designed and implemented a digital tool to enable the standardization of its procedures, the control of its operations, and accountability for its actions. We first offer a brief overview of international practices, then present the current procedures within the School Committee, and finally substantiate a proposal for their targeted improvement based on selected requirements of the ISO 9000/9001 family, with the aim of enhancing traceability, accountability, and implementation control. At the same time, it is clarified that the School Committee has developed and is already using the digital tool with an explicit intention to converge toward ISO 9001. Although the path to full compliance is lengthy, the tool's initial design followed—at least in its basic lines—the logic of the standard.

2. School Committees and Organizational Typologies in Europe

Across Europe, bodies equivalent to "School Committees" appear in three typologies, which may coexist depending on the context: (a) participatory councils at the school-unit level with statutory representation and responsibilities relating to regulations, collective planning, and elements of financial oversight (e.g., Consejo Escolar – Spain; Consiglio di Istituto – Italy; Conseil d'école/Conseil d'adminis-

tration – France; Schulkonferenz – Germany; Medezeggenschapsraad – Netherlands; Schoolraad – Belgium); (b) boards/legal entities that serve as the responsible legal person for one or more schools with strategic and accountability duties (e.g., Trust Boards/Local Governing Committees – United Kingdom; Boards of Management – Ireland; Schoolbesturen – Netherlands/Belgium; Bevoegd gezag – Netherlands/Belgium); and (c) mixed/multi-level schemes (shared governance) in which the unit-level body co-shapes policy and monitors indicators, while the owner or higher tier (municipality/region/ministry) determines investments, infrastructure works, and the regulatory framework. The core dimensions of differentiation include decisional versus advisory authority, scope of financial management, composition and co-decision rights, and the characteristics of collaboration with the property manager (municipality or board).

3. Organizational Models for School-Building Maintenance Units

Three basic organizational models can be distinguished in the provision of maintenance services for school buildings: (a) the intra-municipal model, in which municipal technical services act as the housing authority, performing preventive/corrective maintenance, compliance checks, energy upgrades, and technical supervision of works (common in countries with strong local government, such as Germany, France, and the Scandinavian countries); (b) the facilities-management model, in which the legal entity governing the schools owns/manages school property and organizes in-house technical teams or service contracts under national asset/estate-management standards (illustratively, England); and (c) mixed/graded schemes, where municipalities cover small-scale operational maintenance while major interventions fall to a higher tier or specialized bodies, often through inter-municipal consortia. In all cases, a unified mechanism for handling support requests is applied: the school submits its request; the competent committee validates prioritization on the basis of risk and functionality; the housing authority assigns the task; and technical services implement it. Minor repairs are received and validated at the school/committee level, while the owner approves budgets and oversees projects.

4. The Case of the School Committee of the Municipality of Thessaloniki

Within the Greek context—specifically the School Committee of the Municipality of Thessaloniki—a typical request (e.g., restoration of classroom lighting, heating failure, equipment procurement) activates a comprehensive mechanism: entry into the platform, routing, categorization and completeness check, inclusion on the agenda, decision, contracting, execution, acceptance, and payment. Processes include assignment to a staff member, use of standardized responses, filing in folders/statuses, tracking Board and President decisions, publication on the national transparency portal (Diavgeia), and integration with accounting. The School Committee operates within a controlled environment where standardization is not a bureaucratic burden but a prerequisite for predictability. Within this framework, the digital tool designed and deployed by the Committee plays a central role in standardizing processes and roles and—insofar as possible—approaching ISO 9001 requirements, with full compliance treated as a deliberate, ongoing objective.

5. Choosing Alignment with the ISO 9000 Standard

Aligning the procedures of the School Committee of the Municipality of Thessaloniki with ISO standards is a strategic choice. ISO 9001:2015 offers a functional framework for a Quality Management System in services: it defines understanding of customer requirements (here, school units and, in the sense of the municipality, the internal customer), control of externally provided services and suppliers, standardized delivery with traceability and change control, and structured performance evaluation and management review. ISO 9000 provides common terminology and quality principles that prevent ambiguities, while related standards (ISO 41001 for facility management, ISO 55001 for asset management, ISO/IEC 20000-1 for IT service/helpdesk management, ISO/IEC 27001 for information security) can reinforce critical axes in the future. It is reiterated that the School Committee is currently in a phase of approaching ISO 9001: full compliance has not been achieved; however, the digital tool has been designed from the outset to align with the standard's core building blocks.

Practically, the PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act) logic permeates operations: needs and objectives are defined, interventions are executed, results are checked, and corrective/preventive actions are taken. Instruments such as clarity of roles, calculations of service time and quality, change control, comprehensive documentation with stage-wise traceability, and infrastructure protection are integral to ISO 9001 and are to be progressively embedded through the platform. The transition from we do things well to demonstrably excellent requires decisive steps: setting maximum request-fulfilment times; formalizing in-platform controls; clarifying responsibilities; interoperability with accounting; an asset register with preventive maintenance and reliability/availability indicators; and, finally, an annual internal audit program with systematic corrective/preventive actions.

6. ISO 9001:2015 Requirements

ISO 9001 requires defining whom you serve, how you operate, how you document and measure, and how you improve—with control of risks, roles, suppliers, and changes. Following the established numbering, key elements include: 4. Context of the Organization; 5. Leadership; 6. Planning; 7. Support; 8. Operation (8.2 requirements, 8.3 design, 8.4 control of external providers, 8.5 service provision and traceability, 8.5.6 changes, 8.6–8.7 release and nonconformities); 9. Performance Evaluation; and 10. Improvement. Clauses 9 and 10 mandate measurement, controls, and management review: How long did the request take from submission to decision, and from decision to completion?

7. Mapping the Procedures of the School Committee of the Municipality of Thessaloniki to ISO 9001

Table 1. Mapping of Procedures to ISO 9001

Process Step	ISO 9001 Clause(s) & Notes
Submission & clarification of request	8.2: (Service requirements): acceptance criteria, communication
Assignment/contracting to external provider	8.4: (Control of external providers): supplier evaluation, terms, monitoring
Service provision & change control	8.5 / 8.5.6: stage-wise traceability, protection of third-party property, changes
Receipt/disposition & deviations	8.6 & 8.7: protocols, handling of nonconformities
Measurement & review	9: internal audits, management review
Improvement	10: corrective/preventive actions, PDCA

8. The Goal: "A Simple, Fair, and Fast Service for Every School"

The overarching goal is that every school knows where to submit a request, when it will be served, and who is responsible—without complex terminology and procedures. Operations rest on a single digital point of contact (the platform already in use) and three straightforward priorities: immediate safety/operation, serious difficulty, and improvement. Alongside these priorities, the intent is to publish clear response times for each category to ensure transparency and predictability. Each request is recorded with a unique code, a brief description, and key dates (submission, approval, completion). The school is informed about the request's progress and, upon completion, provides two lines of feedback on satisfaction. At the end of each month, a concise summary is published: how many requests came in, how many were resolved, in what time, and what remains pending. Concurrently, a performance card is maintained for partners, so that future selections are evidence-based.

9. Charting the Path Toward the Goal—Conditions for Achievement

Operationalizing ISO 9001 principles presupposes two interlinked mechanisms: a clear service-management architecture and a coherent data infrastructure that renders quality measurable. Management rests on clearly articulated roles and responsibilities, service-level agreements that capture expectations of time and quality, and change-control procedures that prevent erroneous execution—embedded in the digital tool with mandatory recording of who does what, when, and why.

Time-and-quality expectations must be realistic, differentiated by request category, and tied to technical or operational risk. Prioritization can be based on a simple yet robust risk-impact model, where cumulative scoring determines work classification and where any change is documented with a concise justification in the platform. Data infrastructure constitutes the second pillar: unique identifiers, timestamps for all milestones (submission, approval, assignment, start, completion, acceptance, payment), role fields, and structured categorization of work types. These enable management review, surface causes of delay, and support corrective/preventive actions. Control of externally provided services requires a compact assessment scheme integrating response times, execution quality, documentation completeness, safety compliance, and protection of school property—linked to future awards. Interoperability with accounting and the asset register is critical: payments must not precede documented acceptance, and significant interventions must update asset maintenance history to enable lifecycle analyses.

10. Conclusion

A school unit's request initiates a documented cycle that begins with a clear requirement and ends with measurable value for a safe, functional, and high-quality learning space. Grounding this cycle in ISO principles and requirements brings precision, transparency, and resilience: the School Committee shifts from reacting to problems to proactively delivering evidenced services to the school community. By institutionalizing service management, developing measurable indicators and reviews, and ensuring interoperability with accounting, asset registers, and preventive maintenance, progress toward ISO 9001 alignment becomes realistic and efficient—processes become predictable and comparable, decisions evidence-based, and the value delivered to students, educators, and the local community visible, sustainable, and continuously improving.

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