

The Improvement of Services Quality

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Abstract

In the last decades, there was a strong national and international tendency to increase the services role in the economic social life. The technical progress, the enhancing social division of labor and the increase of demand both from the population and entrepreneurs led to the services development and diversification.

Due to the recent radical changes in all economic, political and social fields, the economic agents' goal to gain a rapid and substantial profit was gradually replaced by the fierce struggle for quality domination among competitors. Therefore, there is an increasing need to find more effective ways to improve the services quality, such as training and motivating the staff and implementing a quality management system.

Keywords: improvement, quality, quality management, services quality, strategies.

Introduction

Quality is the main factor in regulating the market as it is supported by the customer who has the right of choosing the best for his needs and expectations. Thus, considering the customers' needs a priority, quality becomes an important factor for civil society.

Unlike products, the service quality assessment can be done only after its consumption. The services quality assessment is not always very clear, as it has a higher degree of subjectivism difficult to be quantified. When the quality does not meet the customers' demands, he immediately expresses the discontent that may entail the customer's dissatisfaction.

Generally speaking, most of consumers change their preference for one or another company, primarily due to the low services quality and secondly because of the prices.

The improvement of services quality

Quality is a strategic element of global management and organizations which determines the services competitiveness both domestically and internationally (Stanciu 2007).

One of the most concise significance of "quality" is the ability of using it (Juran 2002). Further to a detailed analysis of this basic definition we may ascertain that it branches into the following:

- Quality consists of those features that meet consumer's needs . Thus, the high quality may be very expensive, having a prevailing effect over sales and enabling the companies to:
 - Enhance the customers satisfaction;
 - Increase the services merchantability;
 - Face competition;
 - Increase the market share;
 - Ensure the sales incomes;
 - Set favorable prices.

- Quality means lack of any deficiencies. In this case, the high quality may be less expensive, having a prevailing effect over the costs and enabling the companies to:
 - Reduce error degree;
 - Reduce losses;
 - Reduce the failures in various fields;
 - Cut the collaterals expanses;
 - Drop the customers complaints;
 - Cut the control;
 - Shorten period of launching new services on the market;
 - Rise the incomes;
 - Improve performances.

Regarding services, quality usually involves a comparison between the provided service and the one expected by the consumers (Ionciã 2006). When the expectations are met, be they objective or subjective, they will favorably appreciate the service quality.

In the customers' appreciation of services quality, very important are the circumstances encouraging the performance of these services and moreover causing the beneficiaries' impressions.

As for the consumers' expectations, they are determined by a lot of factors (Cetinã 2006), such as:

- Verbal communications;
- Personal requirements;
- Experience;
- External information.

Nowadays, it aims at getting the entire services quality, consisting in several components (Ionciã 2006) such as:

- *Economic* – quality hampers the losses and expenses resulted from a bad service quality;
- *Strategic* – quality is part of the organization culture image;
- *Organizational*- quality is part of organization culture;

- *Human-* quality must be completely accepted and integrated by the whole organization staff.

In case of eventual assessment of the services quality at a monetary or estimating scale, this would be translated into willingness to pay more or less, depending on the services quality. Most of the times, the customer is willing to extra pay for a better quality.

Usually, evaluation of services quality is associated with the best performances . The customer is the one who sets the quality depending on the service he needs. The customer appreciates quality of service provided by his own subjective criteria.

There are two levels of customers' services quality assessment (Stanciu 2009):

- *the accepted level* that shows us what is enough on customer's opinion (the minimum level of attributes useful for the services selection);
- *the desired level* which expresses what the consumer expects/ hopes to get.

Hence, this results in two levels of the expected service: desired and accepted. The desired service is determined by personal needs which may have different forms of expression from individual to individual and can be stressing (lower level) or elevated (higher level). The assessment of the desired service is carried out according to the customer's own requirement and varies from individual to individual.

The accepted service is assessed with the support of accidental factors or of those with a better anticipated level of service, hence making possible various higher or lower levels of service acceptance.

The highly important concept of "exceeding the customers' expectations in services field" represents the main objective of the entire quality. This concept application requests a better satisfaction of priorities as it benefits from some additional features keeping the same cost, or in other words, the costs rises are not significant compared to the resulted satisfaction.

Otherwise, the services buyers appreciate the service quality from two perspectives. The first perspective is that of common, regular service which raises no particular problems. The second perspective refers to a special situation when a mistake occurs. The organizations specialized in solving the particular problems occurred because of some mistakes by courtesy, credibility, reliability and empathy, are successful on the market compared to those ignoring these kinds of situations and do not solve them efficiently.

Usually, the quality assessment perceived by the customer, when applied in organizations, may be focused on (Stanciu 2009):

- the increase of profit or reliable customers;
- the cut of costs by dropping the losses;
- the increase of involvement and employees' satisfaction;
- the employees' turnover decrease.

The business success depends on the quality of all activities directly or indirectly related to the services performance. The services quality improvement can be mainly fulfilled through:

- staff training and motivation;
- implementation of quality management system.

a. The staff training and motivation

The services quality improvement represents a quite difficult problem and for its achievement it is recommended to take into account the decisive factors for getting the desired quality.

On my opinion, the key factors for a services quality (see fig.1) rely on :

- Facilities (buildings) and materials (equipments and electric endowments)- the tangible part of service;
- Methods and procedures for service providing;
- Professional training and personnel behavior.

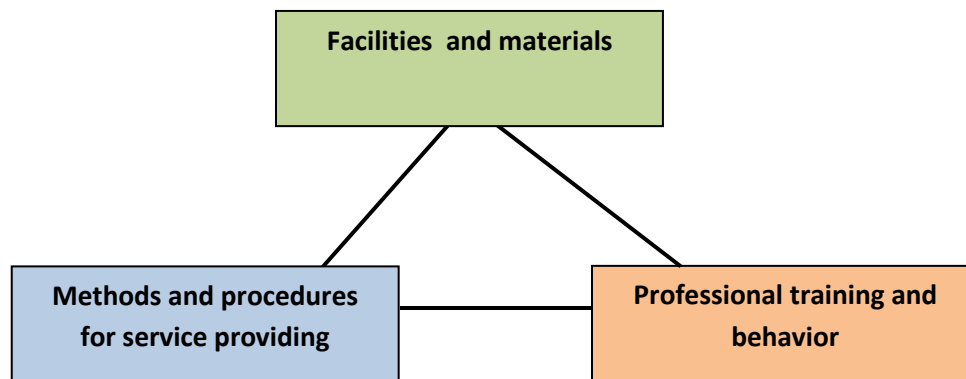


Fig. 1 *Key factors for services quality*

Although the facilities and equipments give the service some “visibility” and the methods as well as the procedures of providing can individualize it, the most important role in getting the quality of provided service is played by the human factor, analyzed in terms of his/her professional training and behavior.

The quality of service provided to an external customer depends decisively on the domestic services quality as every employee is a service provider for somebody else who is a client (Stanciu 2009). If the goal within the organization is to exceed the customers’ expectations, it will have a positive reflection on the external customers, who target the same outcome.

Therefore, the assessment of human potential within the company has a great importance both for management and employees, as it raises productivity and achievement of the objectives in the quality field.

Training the entire personnel is very important for the services quality as the motivation for “a constant good job from the beginning” is stronger (and safer) when all the employees were persuaded and trained in the quality field. The motivation is closely related to the services quality and goal achievement.

Among the personnel motivation factors in quality field we can mention (Hohan 2005):

- The public recognition of employees;
- The setting out of ambitious and exciting objectives;
- The permanent information on the financial situation and on the level of targets achievement;
- The setting out of a creative team framework by increasing the autonomy and freedom in taking the decisions;
- The setting out of employees' talent and intelligence development framework as well as the insurance of professional career perspectives.

Moreover, the personnel instruction is a guarantee for an efficient achievement of the quality objectives. The instruction ensures the personnel's acting skills, so the current work tasks can be performed at the level of required quality.

Usually this target can be achieved by attending some courses in management. However, the company's personnel instruction will be productive only if the training program meets the requirements.

b. The setting up of the quality management system

Another way of improving services quality is to set up a quality management system according to the standard requirements SR EN ISO 9001:2008.

The basic target of quality management system is the steady quality improvement as well as the leadership confidence that the proposed quality will be carried out and maintained and the client will be ensured by the regulation of outstanding quality for the rendered service.

The quality improvement based on the concept of "continuous improvement" is the main principle of quality management. The purpose of this improvement is to prevent the loss of the organization competitiveness by identifying all opportunities for improvement and by accepting programs whose setting up may produce expected results in this direction (Hohan 2005).

The development of this principle encompasses actions, approaches and management decisions for a systemic structure of organization and its relationships with customers and other shareholders, as well as when using the appropriate methods and processes.

In this respect, the first step is to identify the improvement opportunities, by analyzing and interpreting the existing information, the feedback from the client and from other shareholders, as well as the service quality dimensions connected to the requirements and customer's expectations etc.

All the aspects of the organization identified as opportunities for improvement must shortly become strategic objectives that may take into account aspects such as: the customers' and employees' satisfaction, service designation and achievement, losses cut caused by the lack of quality etc.

Conclusion

Quality in services can be assessed both at the macroeconomic level by indicators such as value added tax, investments, employment and at microeconomic level by the performance, competitiveness.

The process of determining and establishing the improvement objectives is a continuous process which uses the findings and conclusions of the audits, data and information analysis as well as studies carried out by management, generally leading to corrective action and / or preventive order to increase the likelihood of increasing customers' and other shareholders' satisfaction.

Another way to improve the services quality is provided by the approach of *total quality* and *total quality management* (TQM), as new methods of organizing the activities regarding the quality in service companies.

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