

ORGANIZATIONAL SERVICE QUALITY GAPS EVALUATION



Wiesław Urban
Białystok Technical University
Faculty of Management



Introduction

In the growing service sector there is still the most problematic challenge how to deal with service quality. Quality is one of the most expected by customers, aspects of almost all service products. High and unique quality is a way to win customers and make them loyal for a long time. Management literature proposes many concepts and approaches concerning how to deal with service quality. There are also many different concepts how the notion "service quality" should be understood. One that contains both is the service quality gaps concept.

Objectives

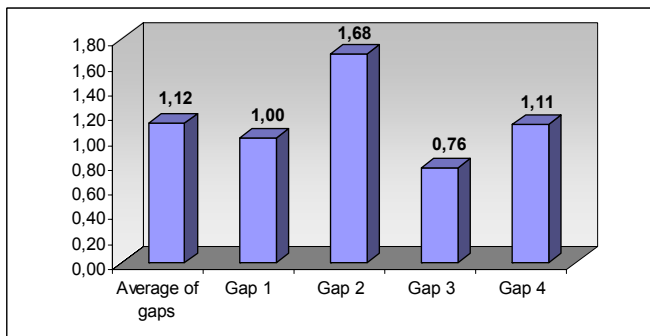
The study takes into consideration the problem of organizational service quality gaps where quality losses, inside organizations, take place. The main purpose of this study is to evaluate organizational service quality gaps by a survey in an enterprises' sample and by detailed case study analysis. The next aim is to assess how important the quality gaps are for service firms. If they had a significant relationship with key business performances it would prove their importance as a management tool in service organizations. The case studies are able to show if in a service organization there is possible to identify only four organizational gaps proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (PZB) (1985) or more, detailed, specific for particular organizations. All of these allow for the author to propose, taking advantages from the wide quality management literature output, a few basic suggestions and ideas concerning how to deal with quality gaps. Even though the idea of service quality gaps was proposed rather long time ago, recently it has had few continuators; and there are still lack of application tools which taking full advantage of it. Thus it is considered that the research achievement and final conclusions might be valuable also from practical point of view.

Method

The main role in the research process plays two methods: questionnaires survey and case study. The random sample of 230 service enterprises was surveyed; all of them are localized in the northern-eastern and central part of Poland (three regions). The correlation method and structural equations were employed to data analysis. For two firms from IT service sector and education sector a case study analysis from the point of view of service quality gap identification was conducted.

Main research achievements

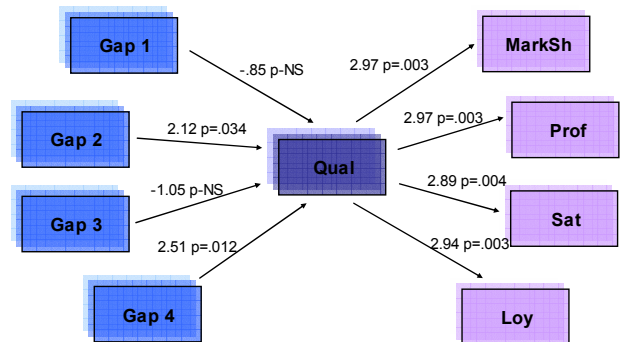
In the investigation process it was asked how managers assess variables which constituted quality gaps. The gaps were counted by subtracting the received score from the maximum score (5). The results are shown in the chart below.



The size of quality gaps

Gap 1 means the difference between customers' expectations and managers' perception of customers' expectations. **Gap 2** – it is the gap

between managers' perception of customers' expectations and service specifications. **Gap 3** – the discrepancy between service specifications and service performance. **Gap 4** lies between external communication and actual service performance. In the survey process also key service performance variables were assessed: overall service quality of a firm (**Qual**), market share changes in the last three years (**MarkSh**), revenue profitability changes in the last three years (**Prof**), changes of customers' satisfaction (**Sat**) and customers loyalty (**Loy**) also in the last three years. The result of path analysis is shown on the drawing below.



Path analysis results, T-Value and Significance

It was predicted before the investigation that the quality gaps would clearly affect the overall quality of services provided by enterprises. Surprisingly, as it is shown, only two out of four gaps have a significant positive impact on the overall service quality – gap 2 and gap 4. So, only the larger quality gaps strictly affected the quality, but according to the correlation analysis others also present some kinds of relationships. Moreover, the overall service quality influences the key business performances.

Case analysis proves that the general model of five service quality gaps needs to be adjusted to the particular service environment, and needs to be made more detailed. There is real possibility to identify new kinds of quality gaps across service sectors.

Conclusions

Present study confirms the Gronroos' opinion that the gap analysis model should guide management in finding out where the reason (or reasons) for the quality problems lie and in discovering appropriate ways to close the gap (2007, 118). It is a useful concept that might be helpful in management practice.

A special attention should be paid to problems of service specifications formulation. It appears as the main quality gap which firmly causes quality losses. Also the external communication emerges as the important reasons of quality losses.

But also it should be concluded that each service organization needs to analyze carefully their own specific quality gaps. Then the concept will be really useful in management. And still there is a lack of guidelines dedicated exactly to quality gaps, namely how to deal with gaps that had been identified in an organization. The literature output in the field of quality management proposes a very useful solution to cope with the quality problems that appear in neuralgic points of processes. This solution is HACCP system. The quality gaps approach can be applied in a service organization in a similar manner like HACCP system in food industry.

It the paper there is only an idea how managers might deal with service quality gaps taking advantage from HACCP. To achieve more useful and precise hints the further researches are required.

References:

- Gronroos, C. (2007) Service Marketing and Management. Customer Management in Service Competition. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons.
Parasuraman, A.; Zeithaml, V.A.; Berry, L.L. (1985): A Conceptual Model of Service Quality and Its Implications for Future Research. Journal of Marketing Vol. 49 Issue 4, pp. 41-50.