

Dimensions of Quality in Services

The analysis of the dimensions of services sector highlights the growing importance of services sector in the economies of developed countries and the correlation between the development level of services and the development of national economies. The share of services in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is a feature that shows the development of a country.

Currently, in the European Union, the share of services in GDP is around 70%. This sector provides most of the jobs for Europeans, namely 67%. In Romania, the services generate nearly 50% of GDP and absorb only 37% of total employment. According to the National Commission of Prognosis' forecasts (*"With a share which is around 50% of gross domestic product and with a sustained growth rate, the service sector will have, in the following period, the largest contribution to real growth of the gross domestic product, of about 3 percentage points."*) in the period 2007 - 2013, services will represent the main generator factor of gross added value to the national economy.

Beyond this quantitative dimension, the services are characterized by a qualitative dimension, as the requirements of a service must be clearly defined, in terms of observable characteristics and likely to be assessed by the customer.

The characteristics typically specified in the documents that determine the quality requirements of a service are:

- plants and equipment, capacity, number of employees, amount of materials;
- waiting period, duration of service provision, the duration of processes;
- hygiene, safety of goods and persons, operation security;
- capacity of response, access opportunities, courtesy, comfort, environment's aesthetics, proficiency, reliability, accuracy, credibility, efficient communication, service rendered in full.

Also, the processes of providing a service require to be defined in terms of characteristics that directly affect its execution. In addition, a feature of the service or of its provision could be quantitative (measurable) or qualitative (likely to be compared), in relation to how it is assessed and depending on the author's assessment.

Objectives that disengage from a correct policy concerning the quality of services must include at least the following aspects:

- customer's satisfaction related to the quality of service;
- extent to which the service activities take into account the environmental protection and the society in general;
- efficacy of supplying/providing the services.

The development of the services demand, the extent of the investments involved in this sector and the increase of its economic role, necessitate the improvement of the quality of the services, this being a decisive advantage of the companies' competitiveness, regardless of their size and activity.

The issue of the quality of services provided by the economic operators in Romania is a matter of modern management, namely a matter of vision, values, objectives and strategies, an issue of good practice codes, standards and models of excellence, as well as a matter of

appropriate settlements. Consequently, it requires strong knowledge of management, especially knowledge about quality and quality management, and also coherent and sustained usage of this knowledge. It takes the passage from the empirical approach of the practitioner in the field, based on common sense and experience to what is called the scientific approach, that of the manager, who adds to the common sense and experience, the knowledge: concepts, principles and laws, methods and techniques, tools, models, standards, best practices etc.

In order to conform with this approach, which generates real and sustainable competitiveness, companies operating in the services' domain must implement and certify a quality management system. The implementation coerces the company to define procedures for the activities so that it ensures repeatability of execution, the formal monitoring of activities, allows a better measurement of performance and also the identification of deficient impact on costs, providing significant savings. Calculations show that the implementation of such a system leads to savings of 10 to 20% of the turnover, an unbeatable argument for any manager.

Also, implementing a quality management system focusing on processes leads to their improvement and lower dependency on people. A quality management system requires a rigorous control of processes and thereby contributes to increased efficiency and effectiveness through coordination and management of the entire activity of the organization in a systematic and planned way.

Supported by an appropriate training of employees, the quality management system contributes to the empowerment of employees and leads to a much better development of the company, providing a framework of clear and predictable evolution.

In a functional market economy, due to intense competition, companies operating in service activities are increasingly constrained to take into account – in terms of diversity, quality and price/tariff – the needs, requirements and expectations of consumers because they – being better informed and trained and thus more demanding – more often prefer to purchase good quality services. As a consequence, both the managers and the employees in the services domain should have the interest to offer to the market quality services for prices/tariffs as low as possible. But in order to trade quality services, managers and employees of companies should: wish, be able to and know how to achieve, assess and improve quality permanently.

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