Chapter 3

Methods for Service Quality Assurance

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes how the four phases of quality management (quality planning, quality control, quality inspection and quality assurance) for service firms should be structured and what individual measures can be employed in the respective phases. Since the QM-system – particularly in the case of the services sector – has to be adapted to a firm’s specific characteristics, the selection of the methods and techniques suited to the specific situation is of particular importance. For this reason, the criteria for evaluating such methods are also outlined. In addition to the classical instruments used for quality management, recently quality awards, national customer satisfaction barometers and certificates have become well established, also sharing the objective of raising quality standards for services. Finally, an overview is given of the techniques and methods used for securing and promoting quality standards which are linked to the phases of the management process – analysis, planning, implementation and audit. This results in the construction of a systematic system for the quality management of services using a ten-step procedure.

1 MANAGEMENT OF SERVICE QUALITY

Establishing a high standard of service quality has increasingly become one of the central activities of service and industrial goods firms as well as of consumer goods firms and has become a major competitive factor. A change in the marketing paradigm has taken place over the last few decades, driven by a sharpened focus in economics on the tertiary sector (services). This is reflected in the way that quality orientation is aligned to a service offering that is based on customer choices (customer orientation).

The higher standards in service quality expected by clients and the potential impact of
quality deficiencies make it essential that service providers adopt quality management systems. In view of the numerous aspects of service quality, it is impossible to achieve ‘total’ service quality by optimizing it simply on an individual level or with regard to individual dimensions. Quality management therefore refers to “the use of dovetailed activities for directing and steering an organization with regard to quality” (DIN EN ISO 9000), where “directing and steering with regard to quality” basically involves the activities of all managers engaged in determining quality policy, objectives, and responsibilities as well as in implementing these via quality planning, quality control, quality assurance and quality improvement in the context of the quality management system (DIN EN ISO 8402:1992).

The Total Quality Management System, originally developed in Japan, has increasingly established itself in the United States and Europe since the end of the Second World War. Numerous quality management concepts, such as Deming’s “14-point Program” (Deming, 2000), “Fitness for Use” (Crosby, 1992) or the “Six Sigma” (e.g. Hummel & Malorny, 2002) (a concept from statistics, which is synonymous with zero-mistake-tolerance), have been subsequently developed under the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM).

One of the important extensions of the TQM-concept is the Taguchi philosophy (Taguchi, 2001), which introduces the addition of a socio-political quality dimension, Process Management (Pall, 1987) and the Kaizen Concept (e.g. Imai, 2002), as a method aimed at achieving continuous and consistent improvements in all processes throughout the firm.

The need for a comprehensive quality management system for services marketing is reflected in the realization of Total Service Quality Management (TSQM). The core concept of a comprehensive quality management system for services, derived from the TQM-concept, is based on the following three building blocks:

- Total signifies that all parties (employees, suppliers, marketing intermediaries and clients) should be drawn into the TMQ process.
- Service Quality signifies consistent quality orientation in service processes in all internal and external customer relations.
- Management signifies that managerial staff has to adopt an exemplary role in representing service quality (a participative-cooperative style of management) (Lovelock, 1988).

2 STRATEGIC FOCUS OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT FOR SERVICES

A comprehensive focus on quality issues of this kind across the service firm requires that a “suitable” quality management concept is devised, developed and implemented; that is, one which is tailored to the individual requirements and resources of the specific firm. The principle objective is to define the strategic focus of the firm’s quality management. There are four fundamental tasks that have to be fulfilled here (Bruhn, 2008):

1. Specification of strategic quality positioning: The firm’s present and future strategic quality positioning has to be determined subject to the profile of its individual strengths and weaknesses and with respect to existing and potential market competitors.
2. Specification of the quality strategy: The quality strategy has to be defined subject to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks present in attaining the targeted quality position.
3. Specification of quality principles: So that a firm’s routine provision of services satisfies quality principles, the quality strategy has to be laid down in the form of a mission statement specifying conduct and quality requirements.
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