Chapter 5

The Role of Quality in Customer Relationship Management

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Abstract: Never before has the issue of quality been the focus of so many scientific disciplines. Deliberations conducted within the realm of qualitology (Kolman 2009) clearly indicate that quality is a category that can have different definitions depending on the context in which it is used. Until recently, the definitions of quality referred primarily to manufacturing. Currently, the attention of researchers and practitioners dealing with quality is not only focused on the quality of products, but also increasingly in connection with the service sector. The purpose of this chapter is to reformulate the concept of normative quality (quality based on norms and standards) into the concept of relational quality (the perception of quality from a customer's perspective). In addition, an attempt was made to demonstrate the extent to which the implementation of the quality management concept in an enterprise affects the process of continuously improving cooperation with broadly understood stakeholders. The employment of the deductive method enabled the author to substantively re-interpret the concept of quality management by "adding value" to the orientation based on cooperation with customers. The adoption of the relational paradigm and extensive use of the Nordic School's achievements made it possible to develop a marketing interpretation of the quality of services. The author undertook to highlight the importance of long-term customer relationships in the context of shaping organizational culture.

Keywords: quality, service quality, customer relationship management, marketing innovation

Introduction

In the 1970s, developed economies began to experience the diversification of mass markets and the emergence of smaller parts – market segments. The essence of this process was connected with the necessity to meet the individual needs of increasingly demanding customers. This process continues to-date and was the subject of interest of such authors as Ch. Grönroos and E. Gummesson associated with the Nordic School of marketing development, as well as researchers from the University of Texas: A. Parasuraman, V. Zeithmal and L. Berry. The work of the above-mentioned authors led to developing the concept of relationship marketing, which is of fundamental importance for reinterpreting the approach to quality. Relationship marketing is defined as a configuration of three components: marketing, relationships (30 different types of relationships can be distinguished), and a network created through building different types of relationships. Relationship marketing focuses on activities aimed at not only making customers the co-creators of value (a product), but also connecting them permanently with the company. The theory of relationship marketing stems from the assumption that customer retention is a critical point (a necessary condition) for long-term business profitability. The main purpose of the discussion presented in this chapter is to reformulate normative quality into a relational approach, which will make it possible to obtain benefits from cooperation with the organization's stakeholders.

The importance of quality increased with the appearance of the social division of labour and the accompanying development of the exchange of goods. Guaranteeing the high quality of both goods and services is regarded as a priority for every organization, which is a consequence of increased competition on the global market. One of the reasons why companies all over the world started to pay attention to the role of quality and quality management were the successes of Japanese companies introducing cheap and reliable products onto the global markets. In the 1970s and 80s, companies from the United States and Western Europe began to be forced out of sectors such as automobiles and electronics in which they had previously held a dominant position.

Japanese companies implemented the concept of quality management based on the philosophy of W.E. Deming and J.M. Juran. It must be remembered that after World War II, Japanese products were associated with low quality. This was largely due to the fact that manufacturing in Japan was based on Taylor's assumptions regarding the organization of work. This approach, which emphasised the importance of a strict adherence to technical specifications and quality inspection, made it possible to reduce costs but did not guarantee increasing the quality of the product offering.

In 1946, the Union of Japanese Scientists and Engineers (JUSE) was founded in Japan comprising representatives of science, industry and government, and which established the Quality Control Research Group in 1949 (Haffer, 2003, p. 124).

J.M. Juran, who propagated the idea of implementing a pro-quality orientation, emphasized the role of managers in the work aimed at quality improvement. According to W.E. Deming, quality management is simply a philosophy of continuous improvement. To convey this to the managers of the largest Japanese companies W.E. Deming presented the concept of the PDCA cycle (Hamrol, Mantura, 2006).

The philosophy of W.E. Deming was based upon three main pillars (Drummond, 1998, p. 25):

- customer orientation,
- continuous improvement,
- commitment of all employees.

Evolution of the approach to quality management

The idea of continuous improvement that was advocated by the luminaries of the Total Quality Management (TQM) concept, W.E. Deming and J. Juran, referred to the definition of quality proposed by Plato in ancient Greece. This philosophical approach to quality assumed that quality is a state of perfection that cannot be achieved, but which should be pursued.

An important time in the development of the approach to quality was the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. It was then that the sphere of services began to be included in research on quality. Since the mid-1980s, quality has been one of the most frequently discussed issues in the literature relating to service marketing. The first to undertake the issue of the quality of services were researchers connected with the Nordic School of marketing (Payne, 1995, pp. 19–20), as well as a group of academics from the University of Texas: A. Parasuraman, V. Zeithmal and L. Berry. Ch. Grönroos believes that a service is perceived individually and therefore subjectively, which justifies the introduction of the categories of expected quality and experienced quality (Figure 1).

Global service quality is determined by comparing the expected quality with the experienced quality. Expectations regarding quality are shaped by the following elements (Rogoziński, 1998, p. 207):

- market communications such as advertising, direct mail and public relations. Due to their nature, it can be said that these are forms of communication over which the company has an influence,
- the image and the opinions of customers, which the company can influence only indirectly. Other people's suggestions and opinions may have some impact, but a person's opinions and views about a company are primarily determined by their previous relationships with it,
- the customer's needs also influence expectations with regard to quality.

Considering the above, Ch. Grönroos suggests taking into account two dimensions of service quality (Otto, 2002, p. 140):

- 1) technical quality (what the customer receives),
- 2) functional quality (what the standard of the service is, how the service is provided).

The perceived service quality model developed by Ch. Grönroos was based on the approach to the service provision process formulated by L. Swan and L. Combs. These

authors stated that the perceived performance of a given product can be divided into two sub-processes (Otto, 2002, p. 140):

- instrumental performance: connected with production and is technical in nature. With regard to services, it may be associated with the technical requirements necessary to perform a service,
- expressive performance: concerns the psychological dimension of production. In the case of services, it concerns the relationships between the service provider and the recipient.

Figure 1. Perceived quality model

Source: (Otto, 2001, p. 139).

In 1985, when analysing the importance of expected and experienced quality in assessing the service offer, a team led by A. Parasuraman developed the service quality model. This was the first model designed to measure the quality of service (Rogoziński, 1998, p. 201) and permitted the identification of universal criteria for assessing the quality of services from the perspectives of both customers and company managers (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, Berry, 1990, pp. 175–186). Five areas in which differences in quality assessment may occur have been identified in this model:

- gap 1 – addresses the difference between consumers' expectations and the interpretation of these expectations by the management,
- gap 2 – addresses the difference between the management's interpretation of customers' expectations and the normative quality of service,
- gap 3 – addresses the difference between the quality specifications that a service should meet and the actual level of service delivered,

- gap 4 – addresses the difference that can occur between the information received by the customer through promotional activity about the quality of the offer and the actual quality of the service,
- gap 5 – addresses the difference between the quality that customers expect and that which they actually receive.

A. Parasuraman, V. Zeithaml and L. Berry identified ten criterion used by consumers when assessing the quality of services (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, Berry, 1990, p. 20):

- 1) credibility – trust, integrity of the entrepreneur,
- 2) security – lack of danger, risk or doubt,
- 3) accessibility – approachability and ease of contact,
- 4) communication – listening to customers and keeping them informed,
- 5) understanding – striving to get to know customers and their needs,
- 6) tangibles – appearance of the facility, equipment, devices, and of the personnel,
- 7) responsiveness – the desire to assist customers and provide quick service,
- 8) reliability – the ability to perform services in a reliable and accurate manner,
- 9) competence – having the knowledge and qualifications necessary to serve customers,
- 10) courtesy – friendly attitude towards clients and respect.

Later, A. Parasuraman and his team narrowed this list of criterion to five dimensions of service quality:

- tangibles – understood as the external and internal appearance of the facility, equipment, media, dress and behaviour of the staff,
- reliability – the company's ability to provide the service in a competent and reliable manner,
- responsiveness – willingness to help customers and quickly respond to customers' expectations,
- assurance – competence of the service provider's staff and their ability to gain customer trust,
- empathy – the ability to personalize the approach to each client and meet their expectations.

The above criterion were used as a basis for developing the Servqual questionnaire, designed for assessing the quality of services. Additionally, the questionnaire aimed to identify and interpret possible discrepancies in the assessment of quality between the customer and the service supplier (Rogoziński, 1998, pp. 202–203).

In view of the discussion so far, it can be said that the quality of services seems to be more complex and more difficult to define clearly than the quality of products. This is largely due to the fact that customers, rather than simply being the addressee and reviewer of the company's market offer in the case of product assessment, actively participate in the process of creating services, thus becoming to some extent their

co-creators. However, in order for a customer to be an active co-creator of a service, they must fulfil certain functions (Rogoziński, 1998, p. 125):

- service description or problem description: particularly important in the case of services delivered to individual orders because the customer must specify their requirements as to the expected results of the service. The service provider, in turn, should adapt the process of providing the service to the customer's expectations,
- co-creation of services: related to the customer's involvement in the work necessary for the implementation of the service, for example data collection (consulting services or monitoring life functions in medical services),
- involvement of customers in controlling the quality of service: in service stations, for example, customers can observe the work of mechanics during car repairs (glass walls),
- impact on staff morale: a service company may consciously incorporate the relationship created between the contact personnel and the customer into the process of providing the service, considering them to be an essential component because of the beneficial effect they have on the staff. An employee, observing the professionalism of the customer's activities, tries to guarantee a high standard of service in order to become a partner in this relationship (e.g. customer account managers in banks),
- impact on the development of the service delivery system: it should be emphasized that the best stimulus for the development of a service company is a conscious and demanding customer who, based on previous experience with companies operating in a given industry, expects a higher standard in the service offer (increased awareness of patients in healthcare institutions),
- inclusion of clients in the marketing communication process: customers, based on their previous experience in dealing with other people, formulate opinions on the service offer and in this way make certain recommendations that may encourage or discourage using the services of a given service company.

Another author who identified the criteria for assessing the quality of services is C. King, who distinguished dimensions such as responsibility, competence, accessibility, courtesy, communication, credibility, security and understanding (Karaszewski, 2006, p. 20).

Research on quality had also resulted in the development of other models, one of the most important being that developed by E. Gummesson. His model appears to have a clearly industrial origin. E. Gummesson introduced the 4Q's, which are treated as premises for perceived quality and satisfaction: design quality, production quality, delivery quality, and relationship quality. The first of these means that the more perfect the design, the better the product can fulfil the functions expected by both internal and external customers. Production quality refers to the best manufacturing in accordance with the design, which is influenced not only by the service providers but also by everyone involved in this process. Delivery quality means not only a timely delivery

of goods and services, but also the provision of proper documentation and efficient transport. Finally, relationship quality serves to determine and assess how successful a company is in creating external relationships (and networks) with customers, partners and business associates.

Comparing the models developed by Ch. Grönroos and E. Gummesson, it can be noticed that a common element is the assumption that the quality of the offer is ultimately determined by the perception of the buyer. This premise led to the construction of the integrated Ch. Grönroos – E. Gummesson model (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Ch. Grönroos – E. Gummesson quality model

Source: (Rogoziński 1998, p. 209)

The model is characterised by the following features (Rogoziński, 2012, p. 209):

- 1) it integrates two approaches: one (Ch. Grönroos) which used empirical data from qualitative research in services; and another (E. Gummesson) which was an adaptation of a qualitative model developed in a manufacturing company for the service sector,
- 2) the syncretic version of the model can be used by service companies, as well as in providing a map of how customers think: for them, quality assessment is the sum of experiences and observations gained from obtaining a service,
- 3) in the improved version of this model, the authors also assume that from the point of view of the content of the offering, goods and services constitute an integral/ indivisible whole.

The impact of quality management on customer relationships

In the context of the discussion presented above, it can be assumed that the quality of services means the provision of services that meet or exceed customer expectations. Therefore, in order for a service to be considered of sufficient quality, it must be provided in accordance with the requirements of the recipient (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, Berry, 1990, p. 18).

By adopting a relational interpretation of quality management, it becomes possible to re-interpret the theory of competition. To achieve this, it is necessary to “add value” to the concept of cooperation with stakeholders. Such an approach to the issue is consistent with an innovative approach to management, highlighting the importance of organizational culture. Following the Oslo Manual in relation to the role of relationship management in organizations implementing a pro-quality orientation, it can be stated that such activities are marketing innovations. This category includes changes in the rules of operation which aim to achieve better results through greater staff satisfaction (an increase in the productivity of employees who identify with the company) and access to resources; including the knowledge possessed by the stakeholders as well as those that were previously regarded only as competitors (Oslo Manual, 2005).

This approach was an inspiration for other authors, one of whom was R. Hoffer, who assumed that quality analysed in the context of business improvement enforces the pursuit of maximizing business results in every area of the company's operations. This should be understood as not only optimizing the processes related to the production of material goods or the provision of services, but also managing relationships that exists both within the organization and between the organization and its environment (Haffer, 2011, p. 3). It seems useful at this point to explain the concept of improvement, understood as a process leading to perfection. According to A. Hamrol, improvement should be understood as activity undertaken in order to achieve benefits both for the company and its stakeholders. Underlining the role of stakeholders indicates the need to emphasise broadly understood relationships. Hamrol also noted that the improvement process should follow the Deming cycle so that it will be possible to identify both existing and potential problems. According to standardized quality management systems, such problems are called non-conformities (Hamrol, 2012, p. 120). The next step, therefore, should be to implement actions that will address the causes of a detected or potential non-conformity. It is essential, however, that organizations should rationally determine the pace of implementing improvement solutions. It is important to remember that people are a key element of this process, and their commitment depends on how well they understand the importance of the implemented actions. Only conscious and motivated employees will be able to become truly committed, taking into account all the different constraints which organisations may face (personnel, premises, finances or information). The implementation of the continuous improvement principle requires the involvement of all the employees. At management level, this can mean setting increasingly ambitious goals. In the case of operational employees, this may involve submitting proposals for streamlining processes, which may result in speeding up individual activities, improving communication, reducing waste, etc.

It must be remembered that the ultimate judge of quality is the customer, who bases their assessment on what they see and understand. It is also important to consider the phenomenon of information asymmetry. The customer usually does not have the same knowledge or experience that company employees and managers have. Thus, a company that wants to guarantee a high quality of their products or services must focus not only on technological processes or work standardization, but also on its relationships with customers.

When building an organizational culture that allows the company to optimize the process of managing relationships with both internal and external clients, it is crucial to remember that quality is a multidimensional concept. According to D.A. Garvin, as a product progresses from the pre-production to production and finally to the distribution phase, the approach to quality changes as the specific phases are characterised by product, production and user orientation. For this reason, D. Garvin proposed various approaches to the concept of quality (Karaszewski, 2006, pp. 16–18):

The transcendent approach: absolute quality defined in a transcendent perspective is defined as an abstract, moral or even religious entity. In this approach quality is intuitively defined as a certain state of perfection that makes it possible to distinguish great quality from poor quality. The transcendent approach was the basis for creating numerous concepts that are fundamental to the development of quality management. These include Deming's fourteen points; W. Shewhart's approach, in which quality is treated as a "good"; or G. Taguchi's discussion of quality in the context of social losses (Kamieński, 1980, pp.138–192)¹. In the transcendent perspective, quality is synonymous with innate perfection. People learn to recognize quality through experience gained as a result of participating in various types of performances or exhibitions (in relation to art), as well as through principles passed down from generation to generation. T. Peters, characterizing the "German" approach to quality, emphasizes that it is one of the basic values through the prism of which people and societies are evaluated (Karaszewski, 2006, p. 134).

The product-based approach: assumes assessing quality in terms of product characteristics or attributes. Different assessments of quality are connected with the presence or absence of measurable features and properties of products. Thus, this approach has the characteristics of objectivity.

¹ This refers to the concept of 'ideal quality', which is the benchmark for assessing the quality of both products and services. According to G. Taguchi, a product is of ideal quality if it fulfills its designated functions for a specified period of time under specified operating conditions without producing side effects. With regard to services, ideal quality is a function of customer perception and satisfaction. Ideal quality is therefore a certain target value and deviations from it cause losses for society. Losses caused by harmful side effects are referred to in economics as external production and consumption diseconomies. Production diseconomies occur when the producer's market activity generates irreparable losses to other elements in the environment. Consumption diseconomies occur when using a product or service causes other parties, not necessarily involved in the consumption process, to incur certain losses on this account. According to G. Taguchi's assumptions, a cigarette should be considered a low-quality product even if it has been manufactured by a reputable tobacco company because a person smoking it has a negative impact on other people.

The manufacturing-based approach: approaching quality from the perspective of the manufacturing process involves the need to ensure that the technological process complies with the specified requirements. This approach emphasizes the importance of standardization, which aims to guarantee a product's compliance with the adopted standard. According to this approach, quality is created during the manufacturing process and is identified with the degree to which the requirements specified during the design phase are fulfilled. Analysing the evolution of quality assurance systems complying with ISO 9000 standards, it can be seen that the process of standardizing quality assurance systems increasingly takes into account customer needs. According to ISO 9000:2015, quality (item 3.5.2) is the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics of an object fulfils requirements. It should be emphasized that this applies to both specified and unspecified requirements. This means that organizations implementing systems consistent with ISO 9000:2015 standards must guarantee compliance not only with technical guidelines but also with customer preferences [PN-EN ISO 9000:2015-10].

The use-based approach: assumes that the customer is the ultimate judge of quality. Thus, quality depends on the subjective assessment of the customer, who verifies the usability of the product. The need to consider the customers' perspective and needs was stressed by J. Oakland (1992). Focus on the customer is also the basis of W.E. Deming's conceptualisation of quality, as emphasized by R. Karaszewski. A product cannot be considered to be of high quality if it does not satisfy both expressed and latent customer needs (Karaszewski, 2006, p. 17). In this approach, quality is therefore equated with the degree to which broadly understood customer requirements are fulfilled.

The value-based approach: assumes the need for taking into account the cost of production or service provision when assessing quality. It should therefore be assumed that a high quality product will be one that complies with the specified requirements and has low manufacturing costs. This approach on the one hand focuses on the benefits for the producer, who will make a profit; but on the other hand, the manufacturer has to provide the customer with a high level of quality at a good price. A product can only be considered of high quality if it represents a value for which the customer is willing to pay.

Based on the above approaches, D. Garvin distinguished eight dimensions of quality (Karaszewski, 2005, pp. 20–21):

- performance – refers to the durability and efficiency when using a product. If the product retains its properties for a long time and guarantees high satisfaction during its use, it can be considered as being of high quality,
- features – understood as additional attributes exceeding the basic product specifications,
- reliability – usually defined as the probability of a product surviving for at least a specified period of time (e.g. warranty period). A product is considered reliable if the possibility of a fault occurring within a specified period of time is negligible,

- conformance – when the product design is complete, its characteristic features are determined. It is important to ensure that the parameters of each product match the previous assumptions,
- durability – the degree to which a product withstands all the harmful effects of external factors without a deterioration in both its functional and non-functional features,
- serviceability – refers to the possibility and economic sense of making repairs. A defect does not have to disqualify a product. The speed and ease of repairing it are important,
- aesthetics – refers to the subjective dimension of quality assessment, taking into account such elements as colour, taste, smell, etc. In terms of aesthetics, the measure of quality is the degree to which product attributes meet customer expectations,
- perceived quality – this aspect also refers to customers’ subjective assessment of quality. Customers are often influenced by certain stereotypes about the quality of products connected with, for example, the country of manufacture, qualifications of the staff, historical considerations, or even commonly-held opinions about certain products resulting from promotional campaigns.

Table 1. Changing approach to quality in organizations

Essence	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
	Compliance of quality with requirements	Customer satisfaction	Customer value
Focus on	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• compliance with specifications,• fault-free manufacturing from the start• reduction in faults and corrections	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• close contact with customers,• understanding customer requirements,• orientation to customer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• use of measurement tools and value indicators for customers,• monitoring competitors,• orientation to market expectations.

Source: (Prussak, 2006, p.18).

The approach to quality in organizations has evolved over time (Table 1). While initially the focus was on the technological process and the elimination of defects, in the future, the goal will be to create an offering that guarantees the highest possible value for customers. This change is largely a result of companies recognising the primary role of quality in managing organizations, and it involves both the management and lower-level employees recognising that the primary goal of each company should be the satisfaction of not only the external customer but also, and perhaps above all, the internal customer. This is largely due to the fact that only a satisfied employee will be interested in working towards quality improvement. Therefore, the role of the organization is to create such working conditions in which the employees will feel that their knowledge and experience are properly used, and that their professional development and commitment to work are duly rewarded.

Therefore, another role of the organization is building appropriate relationships within itself. Establishing a dialogue between internal customers creates the premises for creating the so-called quality chain (Konarzewska-Gubała, 2003, p. 26).

Emphasizing the importance of relationships in shaping a pro-quality organizational culture can lead to a certain re-evaluation, namely moving away from a competition paradigm towards a cooperation paradigm. Cooperation can be understood as a complex and multidimensional concept. As K. Rogoziński observes, cooperation can take various forms (Rogoziński, 2012, p. 311):

- limited cooperation, relating to the classic relationship between the service provider and the recipient. Assuming professional services as a reference point, the service provider limits the participation of other parties. This is a consequence of an asymmetrical arrangement with the recipient,
- autarkic cooperation that does not go beyond the organization. Although a service product is designed with the participation of the recipient, only the supplier's own service potential is involved,
- external support involving limited cooperation with external customers. This cooperation stems from cost analysis and optimization of individual phases, activities or functions,
- multilateral cooperation between managers of an institution, its owners/shareholders, the founding body, and customers in the context of satisfying their needs; but also with local authorities in promoting, for example, the region,
- cooperation between customers to transform potential customers into stakeholders,
- strategic multi-sector cooperation aimed at achieving long-term benefits.

Conclusions

Considering the importance of relationships in the development of the quality management concept, it seems clear that broadly understood cooperation will become increasingly important. The engagement of the entire internal potential of an organization as well as stakeholders' expectations is important for this process. Involving customers in the process of developing products helps companies obtain added value resulting from their greater attachment to the company's offering. If customers feel that their knowledge and experience are utilised by the company, they will be able to identify with it more strongly. When analysing cooperation in a strategic dimension, it is useful to refer to the work of a British economist, A. Marshall, who is considered to be the pioneer of the cluster concept. Building relationships with specialized producers or service providers operating in a specific area helps to obtain economies of scale, resulting not only from the possibility of exchanging experience with other entrepreneurs but also, and perhaps above all, a greater ability to attract potential buyers. (Klimczuk-Kochańska, 2016, p. 346) The conducted discussion has made it possible to

develop a marketing interpretation of the quality of services, which can be considered to be a marketing innovation.

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