

ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

ASSESSMENT OF SERVICE SKILLS IN THE COMPANIES PROVIDING WITH LEISURE FACILITIES: RESEARCH IN CUSTOMER APPROACH

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Abstract

On the plane of human capital theories –staff is considered being the most significant resource in a company. The implication is that a company has to take care of employees' competence, their approach towards work, perception and assumption of responsibility, liabilities to a company, etc. Such an approach towards staff is particularly meaningful for service companies, the employees of which are indentified not only with the very company, but also with the service by customers. Consequently, the employees, oriented towards a customer, can become a meaningful condition of competitive advantage (L.Bagdonienė, 2008). Service is more and more influencing companies' business. The process of service skills is a significant and complex element of customer service culture development. According to L. Žalys (2002) it can be described as endless and constantly going on in the certain stages process, which possesses distinctive operation technologies. Good relationship with customers and their loyalty is built exactly under the development process of customer service, as it is one of the sales service staff functions. Development process of customer service: to satisfy customers' needs and requirements. Significant organizational culture is directed towards customer service based on corresponding organizational rules and procedures, practical skills and abilities. The level of the service process depends on the professionalism of the service staff taking care of a customer, communication, responsibility, responsibility and competences. For the assessment of service there are additionally applied two criteria: solution of service problems, and company's policy in solution of service problems. In the research related to the formation and management of service skills, there are researched assessment criteria for service skills: external image/outlook of the companies, which provide with

leisure service, locations and working hours, information about service and their prices, delivery of service, service staff's appearance, staff's qualification and attention to constant customers.

Key words: leisure, skills

Introduction

In the companies which provide with leisure service and where service sales are based on the contact between a service supplier and customer, service skills have a great significance. Staff facilitating customers, on whose behavioral culture, professionalism and flexibility are dependent customer satisfaction with the very service. During the following after-crisis period, great attention is paid to the satisfaction of customers' expectations. Companies, in order to achieve better results, have to better and develop customer service skills constantly. Consequently, in the current market there will be able to survive only those service companies, those will be able to respond to customers' expectations flexibly. In order to satisfy customers' needs comprehensively, the staff of leisure service companies, has to possess sufficient knowledge concerning the development of customer service skills, service culture and cognize the very customers. Customers' expectations encourage the interest in the development of customers' service skills. During the growth of needs, customer service staff is expected to provide professional and qualitative service. Concurrently, leisure service companies have to be interested in the process of customer service skills due to more and more intensifying competition. Being aware of the company's condition and having determined the service areas to be developed, it is necessary to plan which customer service skills problems it is necessary to solve first. *Problematic issue:* How do customers assess service skills in leisure service companies? How have to be solved service skills problems? What service skills problems do customers notice? *Research object* – customer service skills. Article aim – is to assess service skills in leisure service companies under the very customer approach. In order to achieve the aim there have been set the following objectives:

To present the concept, management and criteria of customer service skills and characterize the customer that is self-determined to use the service.

To research customer service skills in the companies, those provide with leisure service in Kaunas City.

Material and methods

Methods: Analysis of literature, questionnaire survey

The essence of customer service skills. The location of companies influences the company's relationship with customers, and impacts the extent and frequency of service consumption. Excluding the following factor the growth of service consumption can be described by great changes in human life and activities those directly reflect during the consumption of service. Consumption costs, recorded researching the budget, reflect how there are satisfied basic and secondary needs, which are satisfied by majority of versatile service. There can be drawn a presumption that the quality of service companies' relationship with customers indirectly is reflected in consumption costs too (Bagdonienė L.2008). Sales delivery function can not be dissociated from a service function, thus it is obvious that in order to sell more, the aim of companies is to serve better, i.e. that it is necessary to develop good customer service skills. According to A. Pajuodis (2005), customer (*consumer*) *service-* is completely defined, although sometimes 'untouchable' (intangible) activity, that is executed by the service suppliers in tandem with sales. According to L. Žalys (2002), *customer service skills* – is organizational structure directed to customers' service, based on the corresponding rules and procedures, practical skills and abilities. Service culture derives from organizational policy and its philosophy. A. Pajuodis (2005) states that *the essence of customer service* – is to satisfy customers' needs and that has to be reflected in the activities of the whole company. All actions – communication, competence and politeness contribute to the development of service skills. According to J. Adomaitytė (2006, p.27) customer service is a company business field that has to operate unconsciously.

Management of customer service skills. Customer service skills, according to A. Šalčius (1998), are conditioned under the organizational structure in a company. One of the most significant company's objectives is to research the organizational management system in a company, company's income and expenditure widely, and to provide with some proposals for their development. Due to the bad organizational management system in a company there are irrationally exploited human resources, tangible and financial resources, there are made mistakes, and made inequitable managerial decisions. As the author states, the key elements of organizational management structure in a company influencing its functioning, are a group of people, general aim, general work and responsibility. Z. Gineitienė, D. Korsakaitė et al. (2003) indicate that is very important for companies to exploit resources. Good management practice in

a company – is not only an instantaneous action, but constant process, continuous efforts seeking for good results in service skills. According to the authors, a good company's business strategy has to respond to the following questions: what is the external environment for company's activities under macro-level (to assess economical, social geographical, regulatory and other factors, and competition), what external environment is in its business field, and what internal company's policy is (current business strategy and possibilities to implement it organizational structure, staff and the organization of business process). I.e. that every company seeking for successful business in the competitive market, has to research personal company's external and internal business policy and its influencing factors well, to study managerial methods applied by business partners and competitors.

According to L. Žalys (2002) the key service rule is that service staff has to be polite, attentive and tactful to all customers with no exception. The service staff has to be ware of morality and moral requirements set for their profession. *Customer service skills* – first of involve service culture, relevant staff management, and spread of information concerning high service culture among employees. In order to achieve this it is necessary to encourage employees to work well. In the following case a good contributor for company's executives is strengthening of motivation. According to A. Pajuodis (2005) good service has to provide with some satisfaction and tie him/her to a company (object). Satisfaction or dissatisfaction can be expressed *actively* (when not only company's employees get aware of this, but all or majority customer's acquaintances. If expectations grow, and service level remains the same, customer satisfaction decreases. It can be stated concerning formation and management of customer service skills that in the company formed approaches and relationship, business atmosphere, organizational structure and culture, and external factors or social, economical, legal-political and technological conditions of society and its economical functioning can significantly impact the development and pattern of customer and company's contact. Customer's participation in the process of companies' activities, orientation of the organization towards a customer, his/her needs, depend on the successful organization and management of service skills process in a company, and the analysis of external and internal environmental factors. The essence of service quality is qualitative customer service that has to satisfy customer's needs and requirements and the requests set for the very service culture in a company. It is significant to discuss the experienced quality aspects, technical and functional quality.

Experienced quality aspects, technical and functional service quality. Technical quality is that what is provided to the customer during delivery of the service – evident phenomena of external service (B. Vengrienė, 2006, p.75). According to N. Langvinienė et al. (2005) quality can often, but not always be measured by a customer, their pattern depends on the selected technical solution. *Technical quality* is usually related to the physical means and technologies of service delivery. Their presence can be demonstrated to a customer before providing with service. *Functional quality*, according to L. Žalys (2002) – is a service delivery process during which a customer passes through a lot of stages and communicates with the staff serving him/her. It involves relationship with customers, service staff's behavior and dressing. Technical and functional quality, passing through the customer's formed possibility image of service and its delivery, causes the customer's experienced service quality and its assessment. Customers can assess service differently; besides, the same customer at different time can assess the service of the same level differently. Consequently, customers' requirements for service can be described in summary as following: diversity, quickness, preciseness, convenience, quality, fair prices and employees' helpfulness.

Customer – is not only a participant of a company providing with leisure organization service, but a required process participant in marketing macro-environmental research (service) – what for him/her there would not be any customer service. It is important to discuss customer's characteristics, and the factors causing customer's decisiveness to purchase.

Results

Research in service skills of leisure service companies. For the research there was selected a survey method. The questionnaire was completed following the most significant criteria, highlighted in the theory, those form customer service skills: responsibility, communication, attractiveness of promotional means.

Table 1

Research questionnaire structure of service skills assessment

Block of questions	Pattern of questions	Question type	Number of questions
Demographic/tangible	Geographical convenience of location, is car park/company's exterior and interior attractiveness installed conveniently	Close	1/5
Company's attendance	Attendance frequency of leisure companies, time when it is gone in for sport most and entertained. Service planning	Close	3

Table 1 (continued)

Research questionnaire structure of service skills assessment

Tangibility of the service staff	Tidiness of the service staff dressing, personal hygiene, and posture if there is worn pinned identification card, service staff's workplace.	Close	8
Responsibility	Do staff communicate with customers quickly, precisely, fast, purposefully, with no hesitation and respectively and do staff offer to a customer some extra service satisfying his/her needs.	Close	7
Communication	Does staff communicate with a customer politely, provide with correct information or find out customers' needs, listen to and encourage customers to speak.	Close	4
Solution of problems	Do service staff quickly explains, responds, provides with possible solutions of problems, find out the problem causes, apologize and thank for remarks and inconveniences.	Close	6
Promotional means	Which promotional means are most attractive to a company	Close	8
Demographic	Age	Close	1
	Sex, place of residence, education, social status, income.	Close	18

Research date: 01-24 March, 2012. Number of respondents: at random customers of Kaunas City sports centers, clubs, leisure and entertainment center 'Mega', which provide with leisure service, totally 103 respondents. Data processed applying Microsoft Excel software.

Research outcomes and summary. At the beginning of the questionnaire there were provided questions which are oriented towards the assessment of companies' image (Table 2).

Table 2

Distribution of image assessment (N=103)

Statement	Totally agree	Agree	Don't have opinion	Don't agree	Totally disagree
Service company is in a geographically convenient place	16	76	0	8	0
It is convenient to approach the company	16	51	4	26	
Car park is conveniently installed	12	44	15	28	1
Company's exterior is attractive	10	51	26	13	0
Interior is attractive	50	29	16	5	1
Working time is relevant	17	54	11	18	0

The convenience of the companies' geographical location was assessed best (76), and working time (54). Premises of the companies providing with service are spacious and that aids the company at the creation of positive company's, which provides with leisure service, image. Managers have to take care of illumination, temperature of premises, musical background and also wafting scent. High assessment criteria of interior attractiveness were caused by the creation of interior design that provides the company with information concerning new service and actions. During the survey it was sought to find out, how often the companies, which provide with leisure service are attended. It proved that 32 respondents (N=103) visit companies several times a week, 25 respondents – daily, 20 respondents even several times a day.

During the analysis of customer behavior and trying to distinguish the certain customer groups, there was provided a question concerning the most attractive hours. Major part of respondent are employed persons, most 36 respondents (N=103) make visits from 15 to 18 o'clock, 28 respondents come after 18 o'clock and later.

Under the next question it was sought to find out if they plan visits to leisure service companies. Result: 75 respondents (N=103) claimed that they plan when they will make visits, 8 respondents make visits on their way or drive passing them, 20 respondents accurately plan a visit. Following the research data it was indicated that major part of customers complies with the customers of a practical type; i.e. these customers who are economically rational. Due to the fact that most respondents come after work, there is taken care of sufficient service supply in a hall and there work more staff serving customers.

How do companies take care of staff image? Customers are inseparable from service process suppliers during service. One of the image elements is service staff's dressing. In the questionnaire there were provided a block of questions under which it was sought to assess service staff's dressing, hairstyle, makeup, personal hygiene and posture.

Table 3

Image distribution of service staff (N=103)

Statement	Totally agree	Agree	Don't have opinion	Don't agree	Totally disagree
Clean and tidy clothes	24	53	13	1	0
Employees' hairstyle and makeup are tidy and not provocative	13	57	16	13	1
Secured personal hygiene	13	54	24	9	0
Straight and open posture	10	49	26	11	1
Worn pinned identification card	33	55	4	8	0

Following Table 3 it can be seen that 63 respondents assess the tidiness of the staff's dressing positively 24-very good, 1-negatively. 57 respondents assessed the employees' hairstyle and make-up positively, 13 respondents assessed very well, 13 respondents did not agree that employees' hairstyle and make-up are tidy and not provocative, 1-negatively. Personal hygiene of the service staff was assessed well, 67 respondents assessed positively. Service staff wears pinned identification card. The best assessment was given (57 respondents) to staff make-up, and to hairstyle and service staff's hygiene (54 respondents). In summary it can be stated that customers assess the dressing, appearance, personal hygiene and posture of the service staff favorably, and that creates presumptions for the provision with a successful service process in the companies providing leisure service.

During the analysis of the service process, the respondents were asked to assess how service staff greets a customer and strike up a contact. Respondents could choose at least 2 variants. 36 respondents related the striking up a contact with a verbal greeting, 21 respondents indicated as a variant of greeting and striking up a contact: a smile and an eye contact, 18 respondents indicated – guest and movements, 4 respondents indicated that service staff strikes up a friendly contact.

During the survey respondents were asked to describe the service staff's workplace. Workplace is tidy: agree 51 respondents (N=103), 23 respondents assessed very well, 6 respondents did not express any point of view, and 20 respondents did not agree that workplace is tidy. Such a distribution of opinion could have been influenced by the fact that the service staff keeps personal items and leaflets in a workplace. The respondents were assessed the workplace of the service staff, 47 respondents assessed positively, 40 – assessed negatively, 13 respondents did not have any opinion. As it can be seen under the research results, managers have to pay more attention for the installment of the service staff's workplace. As relevantly prepared the service staff's workplace will aid at the obtainment customers' trust in service staff, and herewith in the image of the company, which provides with leisure service.

In the questionnaire there was provided a question block under which it was sought to assess the very service process. Respondents were asked to assess the accuracy, quickness and speed.

Table 4

Service staff's responsibility (N=103)

Statement	Totally agree	Agree	Don't have opinion	Don't agree	Totally disagree
Service staff serves customers quickly, accurately and fast	27	32	39	9	0
Service staff responds to the customer's provided questions quickly	19	34	37	10	-
Service staff works purposefully and with no hesitation	16	34	32	18	-
Service staff provides with the right information concerning service and their prices	21	41	27	10	1
Service staff communicates with customers respectfully	22	32	36	10	-
Service staff offers a customer some extra service complying with his/her needs	9	32	49	8	2
Service staff offers a customer some extra service	14	41	35	18	2

Under Table 4 it is seen that 37 respondents (N=103) did not possess any opinion concerning customer service quickness, speed and accuracy; 34 respondents agreed that the staff serving customers works purposefully and with no hesitations; 30 respondents indicated that the staff serving customers works accurately, quickly and fast, 26 – assessed very well, 18 – assessed negatively, 7 respondents do not agree that the staff serving customers works quickly, fast and accurately. Such a distribution of opinions could have been influenced by service staff's personal qualities. Customer service depends on the staff's, serving customers, dutifulness and responsibility.

The respondents were asked to assess if the staff serving customers offers some service complying with a customer's needs: 32 – assessed positively, 49 respondents assessed neutrally, 8 – assessed staff work negatively.

During the assessment of the staff's, serving customers, responsibility, respondents were asked to assess if staff communicates with customers respectfully. 32 respondents – assessed positively, 22 respondents assessed very well, 10 – respondents assessed negatively. Such assessments could have been influenced by the service staff's personal qualities, its ability to listen to a customer. The staff serving customers, in order to serve professionally, has to obtain some professional knowledge and develop it.

Next there was provided a question under which it was sought to assess the staff's, serving customers, communicativeness (see Table 5).

Table 5

Service staff's distribution of communicativeness (N=103)

Statement	Totally agree	Agree	Don't have opinion	Don't agree	Totally disagree
Service staff provides customer with the right information	26	43	21	9	1
Service staff communicates with customers politely and pleasantly	22	37	33	6	2
Service staff finds out customer's needs and asks open specifying questions	16	31	37	15	1
Service staff listens to a customer and encourages him/her to speak	15	31	32	20	2

Assessment of communicativeness aids at the disclosure of the staff's knowledge and staff's behavior during service. As it is seen from Table 5, 43 respondents assess the correctness of the service staff's provided information positively, 26 respondents – very well, 21 respondents did not have any opinion about the staff's provided information, 9 respondents assessed negatively, 1 respondent assessed very badly. In summary it can be stated that the staff, serving customers, has to inform customers about service and provide a customer only with the right information.

In the questionnaire there was provided a question under which there was sought to assess the solution of the arisen situation (see Table 6)

Table 6

Assessment distribution of problem solution (N=103)

Statement	Totally agree	Agree	Don't have opinion	Don't agree	Totally disagree
Service staff responds to customer's complaints and arisen problems fast	17	39	35	7	2
Staff relevantly explains and provides with possible solution variants of problems	19	33	38	9	1
Service staff listens to a customer accurately, with no interruption, and finds out the cause of the problem	18	33	29	13	7
Apologizes a customer for inconveniences	22	33	35	5	5
Thanks a customer for remarks	20	39	29	8	4
During complex situations does not use words 'no' and 'don't know'.	13	34	34	14	5

Under Table 6 it can be seen that 39 respondents (N=103) assessed the service staff's response to customer's complaints well, 17 respondents assessed very well, 35 – respondents did not possess any opinion, and 7 respondents assessed very badly, 2 respondents assessed very badly. 33 respondents assessed the service staff's efforts to listen to a customer accurately, with no interruption and finding out the problem cause. Under the research it was defined that major part of respondents (38) assesses efforts to explain and convey possible solution ways of problems relevantly. Consequently, the staff's serving customers, efforts were assessed well; however authorities have to pay more attention to the solution of problems. It is necessary to control the service staff's work and to make the right decisions in order solve a problem.

According to A. Pajuodis (2005), in case of more saturated market, and more versatile customers' needs, and strengthening of competition, the significance of competition is increasing constantly. In the questionnaire there were provided questions, following which it was sought to assess the means of sales encouragement in leisure companies. Due to the fact that different discounts, actions and other means of sales encouragement enable the purchase of the desirable service cheaper, customers assess the sales encouragement positively. The respondents' opinion concerning the attractiveness distribution of promotional means for the sales encouragement is provided in Table 7.

Table 7

Attractiveness distribution of promotional means (N=103)

Statement	Totally agree	Agree	Don't have opinion	Don't agree	Totally disagree
Printed advertising (advertising announcements, publications, leaflets, periodical)	31	39	27	3	-
Advertising in the place of service provision (and indoor advertising)	37	41	21	1	-
Broadcasted advertising	38	29	26	4	3
Discount cards	47	28	21	4	-
Advertising souvenirs	21	44	25	5	5
Competitions, lotteries, games	35	27	32	4	2
Actions	49	28	19	3	1

Through the analysis of the attractiveness distribution of promotional means, it can be seen that 62 respondents assessed the attractiveness of the printed advertising means positively, 31 – very well, 27 respondents did not have any opinion concerning the attractiveness of the

printed advertising, 3 – assessed badly. It can be stated that respondents excluded as an effective means of sales encouragement being the programme of loyalty. This was provided by 47 respondents, those indicated that discount cards are an effective means of encouragement. In summary it can be stated that carrying out programmes encouraging service sales, that the most effective means of encouragement excluded by respondents were discounts and held actions.

Customer is the key element of every company. In order to develop the service process every company has to collect information concerning customers' sex, age, education, earned income and social status. In the research there were participated 62 women and 41 men. During the analysis of customers' point of view, there more reflected the women's approach towards the service process. According to the education the greatest part of respondents consists of ones with higher and college education; according to the social status, major part of respondents are employed, whose average of salaries is from 1000 to 1500 Lt. Respondents were asked to indicate service problems which they had happened to face in the companies, which provide with leisure service. The customers indicated as a frequently faced service problem – the service staffs' impoliteness.

Conclusions

The essence of service skills is the satisfaction of customer's and served service supplier's needs and requirements. Customers' service skills process is a relevant staff management, and information spread concerning service skills culture among employees.

Customer service is an organizational culture directed towards customer service based on relevant rules and procedures of the service skills process, practical skills and abilities. Good results are achieved in companies providing leisure service through the effective organization of customer service skills process. Customer service skills are conditioned by organizational structure in a company, management of human, tangible and financial resources.

During the analysis of service process it is necessary to research customers' behavior. Distribution of customers into separate segments aids the company at the orientation towards those customers, whose actions are the most beneficial to the company seeking for the development of customer service skills and surviving in the competitive market. To perform the market segmentation means to solve the customers' typology or classification under the characteristics.

It was defined that customers in the companies providing with leisure service in Kaunas, assess service skills process passively; however the elements of particular criteria were assessed positively. The customers assessed the convenience of location positively, and the worst assessment fell on the convenience of car parking. There were indicated customers' types which can be divided into groups: mostly constant customers, those visit the companies, those provide with leisure service several times a week, and active customers, who choose service actively. The customers assess the service staff's dressing and personal hygiene positively and that allows favorable presumptions for successful provision process delivered by service staff. It was defined that during service, the service staff's politeness is the most significant for customers. During the conflict situations, the shown respect, staff's response to complaints and arisen problems, excuse to a customer for inconveniences and thanks for remarks are the most significant to a customer.

Customers are the most significant group of market participators, thus the development of relationship is an underlying aim in a service company. Loyalty programmes aid at the achievement of the following aims, the diversity of which is determined by the spectrum of the solved objectives. Service companies can create and implement the programmes of assessment, rewards, discounts, cooperation or coalition loyalty. Independently which one a service company chooses loyalty programmes are created following the certain logical sequence – from the identification of a target group to the foreseeing of the conception in the programme success. The programme participant's comprehended value is seen as the key criterion of success in the encouragement of a customer to refuse to look for alternative service providers.

The further service research, assessing topical for science service areas highlighted by global scholars could be related to the following fields: management of service customers' experience, acceptability of service innovations for a customer, service suppliers and customers' relationship quality and dynamics. Kregždė V. (2012) claims that the year 2012 was called the year of possibilities, thus we would encourage all employees to work well further, strive for the achievement of changes in personal career and discover new possibilities in this company.

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