



The excellence of the service starts from the relative delivery process

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims to demonstrate how the excellence of a service is obtained from the related delivery process.

Methodology: This through a detailed examination of the needs and expectations of customers, a careful analysis of the service delivery process, the evaluation of any opportunities offered by the most innovative technological solutions, an assessment of the consistency of the professional skills of the staff involved and the analysis of feedback coming from customers themselves.

Findings: The research has highlighted how the excellence of a service is obtained by how the services are designed and delivered but also by the relationship that can be created between the parties involved in the delivery process and the relationship with customers. Furthermore, it is important to define each phase of the service delivery process in order to highlight any waste, inefficiencies, opportunities for improvement. In this way, it is important to identify the moments of intervention, to adjust the skills of the subjects involved through training interventions but also to verify the degree of effectiveness of the interventions adopted.

Originality/value: This study aims to demonstrate how to obtain an excellent service starting from the delivery processes of the same and this through an accurate design and analysis of the service delivery process.

Keywords: *excellent services; delivery process; process analysis and improvement; quality of services*

Introduction

It is the goal of companies operating in the service sector to seek excellence and who want to improve their performances by raising quality levels and containing inefficiencies.

To achieve this goal, it is important to: analyze customer needs and expectations, analyze the service delivery process, evaluate the opportunities offered by the most innovative technological solutions and evaluate the consistency of the professional skills of the personnel involved.

The results obtained in pursuing service excellence can be evaluated in terms of customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Furthermore, the excellence of the service depends on how the service is designed and delivered and on the relationships that can be created internally between the subjects involved in the same delivery process and externally with the customers themselves.

In fact, a sufficient level of service is not adequate to create a long-lasting relationship between the customer and the company that provides the service. But the company to retain a customer must focus on excellence in the design and delivery of a service.

This implies the search for continuous improvement in the analysis of every aspect that affects the service delivery process and all interactions with the same customer. The customer is an active part of the service delivery process, and its contribution is essential to increase the quality of the same service.

The pursuit of continuous improvement of a service requires the need to reflect on the factors that define the quality of the service itself (Kkein *et al.*, 2023).

Thus, the following question emerges: what are the criteria that customers can use to judge the quality of the service?

It can mention some criteria, for example:

- reliability, the company must be able to deliver the promised service reliably
- responsiveness: company personnel must be trained in promptly responding to customer requests and providing services
- capacity for reassurance by the staff involved in terms of skills and behavioral aspects
- empathy, the ability to understand customer needs.

To detect these aspects, customer satisfaction surveys can be activated in order to evaluate:

- customer expectations regarding the quality of the service
- the perception of these aspects
- the incidence of each aspect considered in the overall evaluation of the quality of the service

Indeed, it must be considered that the concept of quality of service is a multidimensional concept. It depends on multiple factors so that we distinguish: planned quality, delivered quality, effective quality (understood as promptness, effectiveness and efficiency of the service) and perceived quality (if the service is able to effectively respond to customer needs) (Pott *et al.*, 2023).

But in addition to the analysis of the services provided, it is important to evaluate the methods of providing the services. In order to aim for an excellent solution, it is not only important to consider the service provided but also how the service itself is provided. This shifts the focus to the service delivery process.

According to the Total Quality Management approach, a process approach is the key tool in guiding the organization towards quality and its continuous improvement. In fact, the ISO 9001.2015 standard, in terms of certification, specifies that: identification and analysis of processes, aimed at continuous improvement, are among the specific requirements of a quality management system (Xinwei *et al.*, 2023).

Thus, with reference to the process of providing a service, it can be said that a process approach allows you to:

- highlight any malfunctions and identify the critical points of the same process on which to intervene with appropriate corrective or improvement actions
- review the rules and procedures involved in carrying out the same process in order to simplify it

- activate actions for a better knowledge of the needs of the final recipients of the activities carried out in the process
- promote greater awareness of the subjects involved on what is done and how it works
- identify all the subjects involved in the process and their responsibilities
- redefine the use of available resources with respect to the objectives of the process
- evaluate the activities to be introduced to improve the quality of the results of the process in order to create more intense and effective communication flows.

Therefore, when the service delivery process is designed, it is important to identify the possible critical points of the same, phases that require particular attention in their monitoring to assess whether certain performances are achieved and maintained over time, with a view to customer satisfaction.

To control the quality of a service it is important to activate an effective control system of the process of supplying the same service capable of highlighting, in each phase, the opportunities to improve customer satisfaction or the risks that determine a worsening of their dissatisfaction.

With a view to continuous improvement: what possible reasons can lead to a review of the service delivery process?

- changes in customer needs of the process
- changes in the company's needs (for example, the need to contain times, or costs, or improve the competitiveness of the service)
- failure of the process to achieve the expected results and objectives
- emergence of problems related to the way the process is carried out

Research question

The purpose of the paper is to analyze the path towards the indicated research that provides in its perform a detailed examination of the needs and expectations of customer, a careful analysis of the service delivery process, the evaluation of opportunities offered by the most innovative technological solutions, an assessment of the consistency of the professional skills of the staff involved, the analysis of feedback coming from the customers themselves.

The excellence of the service is based on the hand on the methods of designed and providing services on and on the other hand, on the relationship that can be created both internally between the subjects involved in the delivery process and externally towards customers.

It is important to map each phase of the service delivery process, identify how it takes place today in order to highlight any waste and inefficiencies, possibilities for improvement. It is a question of identifying the moment on which to intervene, the training interventions to adapt the skill of the people concerned, but then verifying the degree of effectiveness of the interventions adopted.

The analysis of a business case will allow us to better understand the indicate evolutionary path.

Theoretical background

The process of providing a service in the pursuit of excellence

In the objective of continuous improvement of the quality of a service, particular attention must be paid to the factors that affect the same quality over time and to the quality of how the different phases of the service delivery process are carried out. This in the awareness that the quality of a service can be recognized in the results provided as well as in the ways in which the same service is designed and delivered.

The pursuit of excellence can be represented as a sort of path in which the company seeks ever more positive results of key factors to improve its performance, such as the ability to create value for customers, the enhancement of the professional skills of internal subjects and adequate management of its processes (Delias and Nguyen, 2021).

Through the mapping of company processes, the processes in which the activity carried out by the company is expressed are identified. This map describes existing processes as they currently carry out.

Through an adequate mapping of the process of providing a service, it is possible to identify the different phases of the same process, to highlight those activities that contribute to increasing the value of the service

provided, the professional figures involved, the possible critical issues that can materialize in inefficiencies. In this way, through the mapping, it is clear how the process of providing that specific service works (Stijn *et al.*, 2023).

Therefore, through the analysis of the process it is possible to understand:

- the flow (the stages in which the same process takes place)
- effectiveness (satisfaction with the expectations of the recipient of the process?)
- adaptability (ability to handle unexpected situations)
- time (time needed to provide the service)
- costs (the costs of the process)

Thanks to a flow chart, it is possible to outline a graphical representation of the activities that make up the process, identifying the actors involved in carrying out the activities, the technological supports used, the checks carried out, etc. (Sala *et al.*, 2019).

Therefore, the analysis of the process can provide useful elements for identifying any critical issues, for a correct planning of the activities and for a more precise evaluation of the performances.

Through mapping, the process of providing a service can be analyzed and monitored. The next phase is to try to optimize the performance of the service delivery process so as to reduce inconsistencies, inefficiencies, excessive complexities in the pursuit of continuous improvement (Fehn *et al.*, 2023).

Therefore, it is a question of deciding how to intervene on the service delivery process to improve its performance and in this sense various alternatives can be presented:

- simplification of the service delivery process by streamlining its development process: eliminating everything that appears unnecessary (unjustified waiting times, duplication of activities, procedural burdens, etc.). in this way, eliminating all unnecessary activities to achieve the objectives also means removing as many wastes as possible: removing all wastes is impossible but trying to minimize their negative effects is important in order to implement the same simplification (Mudge *et al.*, 2022);
- process improvement, allows us to obtain positive results quickly and which can remain constant over time; study in detail the problems that emerged from the process analysis in order to identify the opportunities that can contribute to pursuing improvement objectives. Process improvement focuses on enhancing the activities that generate maximum value for the customer (Barbazza *et al.*, 2015).

To define a process improvement plan, some keywords can be identified:

- re-thinking: rethinking the ways in which the activities have been aimed up to now to exploit the opportunities offered in particular by new technological solutions
- re-configure: pursuing the objective of maintaining the development of the process consistent with the changes that occur over time in the reference context
- re-sequence: revise the sequence of activities that make up the process
- reduce: set yourself the goal of reducing waste and inefficiency
- re-assign: increase the availability of resources needed to improve the process
- re-organize: try to better manage the progress of the process by overcoming the obstacles and inefficiencies that could prevent the achievement of the defined objectives.
- process reengineering: try to activate a significant increase in the service delivery process in order to obtain improvements in the performance obtained: this does not require short times as it is the result of a significant change in the way the process is carried out, in the critical parameters of service delivery in terms of cost, quality and timeliness.

The aim pursued is to obtain significant and measurable improvements that translate into organizational performance (improvements in terms of service quality, cost reduction, time reduction, etc.). It is an approach that has rapidly gained the attention of many companies and which is the basis of numerous change projects.

To this we can highlight the important role of digitization. Digitization refers to the implementation of digital technological solutions capable of making the flows within the process considered more effective and efficient. Digitization today represents a challenge with which companies are called to face if they want to remain competitive in an ever-changing market.

In particular, the digitization of business processes has the purpose of helping to optimize the performance of each activity and the workflows within them with a view to continuous improvement of the company's performance (Jafarzadeh *et al.*, 2021).

While on the one hand it is possible to identify the potential advantages in terms of reduction of manual operations, errors, digitization of paper documents, greater security and traceability of data, better sharing of information (interested parties can access data in time real and communicate with each other), streamlining procedures and, on the other hand, the need emerges not to consider only the technological dimension of change. Indeed, the digital transformation requires:

- reviewing the methods of organizing work within the process (a technological innovation inserted into an inefficient process will continue to produce inefficient results).
- an assessment of the professional skills of the personnel concerned.

The value offered to customers rests on two important elements, which are: increasingly effective and efficient processes and personnel who have implemented these processes with adequate skills, affected by continuous updates. All held together by a process manager capable of developing increasingly challenging problem solving skills in the personnel (Højbjerg *et al.*, 2022).

Another question arises: what improvements in staff skills are needed to make improvements in the service delivery process?

It is talking about the contribution of the personnel involved in pursuing the best relational quality in providing the service in terms of knowledge, professional skills, personal skills (for example communication and relational skills), attitudes towards customers.

The possible support from organizational consultancy in terms of analysis and improvement of service delivery processes is important, a support aimed at focusing the development of processes with a view to contributing to creating value for the recipients of the services.

In this context, the objective emerges of overcoming a corporate logic based on a vision of individual management areas to adopt, instead, an overall vision: the results that the process can pursue are closely related to the ability to create synergies that can develop as a consequence of the fact that each actor involved with his skills contributes to the creation of the value expected by the customers (Orenstein *et al.*, 2022).

Thus, schematically, the phases of a consultancy intervention on a service provision process can be identified:

- process mapping
- breakdown of different activities
- identification of the actors involved
- collection of information on the current methods of carrying out the process
- identification of strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement
- define the objectives of the interventions to be implemented
- concretely define the corrective or improvement actions
- redefine the methods of carrying out the process
- implement the interventions
- verify if what has been achieved allows us to achieve the expected objectives

It is important to proceed again to monitor the process flow in order to verify the effectiveness of the actions taken. For this purpose, it is possible to identify some synthetic indicators able to evaluate the performance of individual activities within the process or the flow of the same process as a whole, as illustrated in two cases examined.

The role of the service delivery process: case study of the training agency

The objective pursued is to provide an excellent service in terms of quality of training provided, while following the changing needs of the labor market.

The agency is committed to seeking levels of continuous improvement within a path that has as its objective levels of excellence in the quality of the service.

How does the training agency pursue this goal?

The improvement path includes:

- an accurate control of the design phases of the training interventions (service delivery process) through the search for an optimal use of the available resources in the awareness that this has a significant impact on one's own performances.
- particular attention to the growth of the professional skills of the personnel who work in the company
- a continuous analysis of the consistency of the organizational solutions adopted in order to pursue increasingly higher levels of effectiveness and efficiency
- a careful selection of the teachers involved in the training interventions; they should have a mix of professional requirements such as to contribute to the quality of the training service provided
- adopt an approach oriented towards the prevention of problems and disservices
- careful evaluation of the training interventions both during their implementation and in terms of learning outcomes and improvement of the performance of the subjects involved
- continuous attention to the level of satisfaction of its customers, i.e. of those who commission the training intervention.

From an organizational point of view, the project for the provision of training services sees the presence within the agency of certain professional figures who, in the pursuit of continuous quality improvement, oversee the entire service provision process with reference to:

- analysis of the professional needs expressed by the client and definition of the objectives of the training intervention
- attention to ensure, at every stage of the process, collaborative relationships with the client
- planning of the training intervention
- provision of the same intervention by adequately managing the technological and human resources used
- evaluation of the results of the training intervention with a view to its adequate quality, combination of effectiveness requirements (linked to the degree of achievement of the defined objectives) and efficiency (linked to the agency's ability to use and enhance the available resources).

This confirms the importance of adequate organizational support in the indicated performance improvement process.

From a more operational point of view, the quality factors relating to the training offer services provided have been identified which are able to determine the level of excellence of the services themselves:

- analysis of professional needs
- design of training interventions
- implementation of interventions
- methods of managing the available resources
- verification of the effectiveness and efficiency of the training intervention
- verification of the degree of customer satisfaction

The assessment of the quality level of the activities carried out includes:

- a qualitative analysis of the results of each training intervention
- the identification of a series of indicators that allow us to monitor the dynamics of the indicated quality factors of the service provided over time.

Thus, for example:

- with reference to the level of effectiveness of relations with the client, an indicator is given by the number of complaints due to a lack of adequacy of the training intervention, a value which should tend towards zero;
- with reference to the level of effectiveness of the training intervention planning process, an indicator is given by the ratio between the solutions presented and the solutions approved by the customer;
- with reference to the level of effectiveness of the modalities of carrying out the training intervention, an indicator is given by the ratio between withdrawn participants on the total number of registered participants; another indicator is given by the ratio between the total hours of absence of the participants on the total hours foreseen;

- with reference to the level of satisfaction of the participants in the training intervention, an indicator is given by the list of reports of critical issues which should tend towards zero.

All of these evaluations serve a dual purpose: to express an opinion on the qualitative performances achieved by the agency and, at the same time, on the ability of the same to continuously improve the results achieved over time in its path towards the pursuit of excellence in services provided.

The role of the service delivery process: case study of the healthcare company

Among the challenges affecting the healthcare sector today we find the quality of healthcare service delivery processes.

In this regard, the awareness is increasingly emerging that pursuing the objectives of improving quality and an "excellent" health service requires an integrated combination of initiatives and projects that involves a series of aspects:

- the organizational dimension in terms of appropriateness of the organizational solutions adopted in process management
- the engagement and professional skills of the staff, an essential resource to be properly exploited
- innovation: if properly exploited, the opportunities offered by digital innovation can lead to an improvement in the quality of healthcare service delivery processes (for example, telemedicine) and an improvement in the governance methods of the entire healthcare reality.

In this context, the case of a local health and social care company is inserted which foresees, among its institutional purposes, that of guaranteeing the care of each person in its own territorial context through a network articulation of its offer of services, with a better integration between hospital and territory, including an adequate connection with the primary care system.

This outlines the objective of pursuing an improvement in the health conditions of the entire population through targeted interventions aimed at guaranteeing more effective and efficient service delivery processes at the level of the entire healthcare supply chain (Rudawska, 2022).

The pursuit of this objective has determined, in the first place, the need to review the pre-existing organizational model in order to highlight its critical points with respect to what has been pursued.

The redefinition of the organizational model sees the transition from a typically hierarchical configuration to one oriented towards a process logic that goes beyond the confines of the hospital to involve the entire territorial assistance network.

The organizational change underway, in the logic that the quality of the service provided is closely linked to the quality of the process of providing it, is based on a series of intermediate objectives:

- adopt a transversal vision of the functioning of the organizational reality as a whole with the definition of solutions capable of promoting greater collaboration both internally and in the relationships between the actors involved in the supply chain
- improve the logistical aspects in order to ensure, on the one hand, adequate hospital and territorial pathways with the optimization of the resources available at the various points of delivery of health services, and on the other hand, the availability of medical devices and drugs to guarantee the appropriateness and punctuality of health services
- improve the management, thanks to the opportunities offered by the evolution of IT solutions, of the information flows along the various phases of the service delivery process
- exploit the opportunities offered by the digitization of health activities both within the hospital and at the level of the entire supply chain, in particular in terms of dematerialization of health records
- implement training courses to adapt the knowledge and professional skills possessed by personnel, also in this case at the level of the supply chain as a whole, with respect to the objectives pursued
- provide for the inclusion of new professional figures, such as the Process Owner, the Clinical Manager, the Network Coordinator, the Risk Manager.

In carrying out this process of change, a telephone survey was carried out on a sample of users of healthcare services in the area. The sample consists of 70 users between the ages of 18 and 70, made up of 65% males and 35% females.

The questions, aimed at identifying significant aspects of the process of providing the health service, concerned the following areas:

- assistance from health personnel (doctors and nurses)
- the environments where health services are provided
- communication between healthcare professionals and service users
- an overall assessment of how health services are delivered.

From the results that emerged from this survey, it can be highlighted on the one hand those positive aspects which characterize the reality considered and which require, in any case, the search for their continuous improvement, on the other hand, the presence of critical elements (particularly in the areas of assistance and communication) to be carefully evaluated in the development process of an excellent health service for the area.

These are results that can provide elements for thought to favor the indicated development path, aimed at promoting quality, efficiency, appropriateness and hospital-territory integration.

From this point of view, the interventions carried out must contribute to creating synergies for the creation of a system oriented, at all levels, to the needs of users and their taking charge, to the transition from the concept of "care" to that of "taking care".

The need emerges to better integrate efforts and actions aimed at jointly promoting corporate governance with the continuous improvement of the quality of the processes for the delivery of health services.

From this point of view, in addition to a more systematic conduct of surveys on the level of user satisfaction, internal auditing programs are envisaged to favor a self-assessment of the results of the activities carried out and the identification and monitoring over time of a series of indicators in capable of allowing an analysis of trends in health and organizational improvement (Scherer, 2019).

Conclusion

There is more and more talk in companies of the goal of continuously improving quality which is understood as the result of all the actions undertaken to increase the quality of the activities carried out over time for the benefit of the company itself and of the customers.

Efforts towards better quality, in particular, of the methods of providing services do not have an end point because the goals have progressively moved forward (Sham, 2023).

The search for improvement in the quality of services is closely linked to the company's ability to act jointly, favoring the development of synergies on four dimensions:

- a dimension connected to an effective implementation of a customer-oriented management approach, which places customers at the center of every activity carried out;
- an organizational dimension, linked to the quality of the process of providing the same service, responding to criteria of effectiveness (being able to achieve the defined objectives) and efficiency (using in order to improve the answers available in carrying out the process itself);
- a technological dimension, linked to the ability to be able to exploit the opportunities and potential offered by digital technological solutions;
- a dimension connected to the professional skills in the company whose professional and personal knowledge and skills must be affected by continuous enrichments and updates.

The cases examined provide a significant contribution in this sense with the aim of providing concrete indications applicable in other company realities.

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