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## SERVICE QUALITY GAPS AND THEIR ROLE IN SERVICE ENTERPRISES DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract.** The study takes into consideration the problem of organizational quality gaps where the quality losses occur. Many service quality gaps are reviewed in this paper. But the four out of five quality gaps by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) are examined. The main management problem, according to research achievements, is the gap between managers' perception of customers' expectation and service specifications existing in organizations. In a service organization usually more quality gaps might be identified. Identification of specific quality gaps is advantageous from a management point of view.

**Keywords:** service management, service quality, service quality gaps.

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### 1. Introduction

In the growing service sector there is still the most problematic challenge how to deal with service quality. Quality is one of the most expected by customers aspect of almost all service products. High and unique quality is a way to win customers and make them loyal for a long time. Management literature proposes many concepts and approaches concerning how to deal with service quality. There are also many different concepts how the notion “service quality” should be understood.

Among many concepts of service quality, the service quality gaps model plays an unquestionably significant role in the service management literature. Gaps approach proposes precious propositions on how the notion “service quality” might be understood and how the service quality emerges across a service organization. The model (Parasuraman *et al.* 1985)

consists of the following gaps: customers' expectations vs. their understanding by managers, managers' perception of customers' expectations vs. service specifications, service specifications vs. fulfilment, information about service vs. service that is actually provided, and, finally, the gap between customers' expectations and service provided. In spite of the fact that the five service quality gaps model is relatively well known, still many researchers propose new frames of service quality gaps. Also there are not too many empirical researches concerning service quality gaps.

The organizational quality gaps which might be employed in a management process as the kind of a tool are less often researched than the customer quality gap. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to evaluate organizational service quality gaps by a survey in an enterprises' sample and by case studies.

The proposed investigation process tries to approximate the size of the four internal service quality gaps proposed by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) in the service industry in Poland. The survey method is employed. The next aim is to assess how important the quality gaps are for service firms. If they had a significant relationship with key business performances it would prove their importance as a management tool in service organizations. Therefore some statistic techniques are employed, like correlations coefficients and path analysis.

Moreover, for two firms from IT service sector and education sector a case study method, from the point of view of service quality gap identification, is conducted. The case studies are able to show if in a service organization it is possible to identify only four organizational gaps by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) or more, detailed, characteristic for particular organizations. All of these allow the author to propose, taking advantages from the wide quality management literature output, a few basic suggestions and ideas concerning how to deal with quality gaps.

## 2. Literature review

In the literature there are many approaches telling us how to understand the phenomenon of service quality; also there are some propositions how service quality is originating in a service organization. Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) as ones of pioneers proposed the service quality gaps concept as a way to put more light on the problem of service quality creation. Service quality gap identification and dealing with it is a useful approach also from a managerial point of view. But many continuators have proposed extensions of the original quality gaps concept as well.

### 2.1. Quality gaps according to Parasuraman *et al.* (1985)

The concept of five quality gaps proposed by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) has its origins in the concept of service quality as a gap between customer's perception and customer's expectations proposed also by the same authors. Service quality as a gap between customers' perception and expectations establishes that customers' expectations are viewed as normative and predictive standards, i.e. customers know what a service provider should and will offer (Parasuraman *et al.* 1994). Then it is possible to assess the discrepancy between what was

expected and what was perceived in the service providing process. For assessing this gap the Servqual method is dedicated, which probably is the most often used method for service quality measurement.

The expectations-perceptions service gap is measured by customers' interviews based on the standard questionnaire (Servqual). The customer gap, like Servqual questionnaire, consists of five attributes (dimensions) of service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy (Parasuraman *et al.* 1988: 23). But this external gap is the fifth one in the service quality gaps model, and is affected by four organizational (internal) quality gaps which interact with one another in many ways (Zeithaml *et al.* 1990). Each of four, internal, quality gaps represents quality losses.

Gap 1 takes place between actual customers' expectations regarding the service performance and the expectations perceived by managers. This gap arises from managements' lack of full understanding how customers formulate their expectations on the basis of the number of sources: advertising, past experience with the firm and its competitors, personal needs, and communications with friends (Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons 2008: 109). The gap might be caused by a lack of time devoted to gaining first-hand knowledge of customers or too many management layers between top managers and contact personnel (Kasper *et al.* 2006), or inaccurate information from market research and demand analyses (Gronroos 2007), etc. In the literature there are some suggestions how to overcome each quality gap. The strategy for closing this gap includes improving market research, fostering better communication between management and its contact employees, and reducing the number of levels of management (Fitzsimmons, Fitzsimmons 2008: 109).

The next quality gap (2) is the discrepancy between managers' perceptions of customers' expectations and the actual specifications that they establish for service delivery (Zeithaml *et al.* 1990). Gap 2 is mainly a result of: the lack of management commitment to service quality, the degree of goal setting, the degree to which the service can be appropriately standardized, and the perception of feasibility (Kasper *et al.* 2006). Authors across the literature suggest setting goals and standardizing a delivery process to avoid this gap. But according to Gronroos commitment to service quality among management as well as service providers is far more important to closing the quality specification gap than any too-rigid goal-setting and planning procedure (Gronroos 1990).

Gap 3 appears when employees are unable and/or unwilling to perform the service at the desired level (Zeithaml *et al.* 1990). The gap is constituted by the discrepancy between specifications of a service that managers have established and actual service performance.

The service performance gap is influenced by three main factors: cooperation, perceived control, and employee-job fit (Chenet *et al.* 2000: 488), what was proved in airlines industry. But, according to these authors, the three factors mentioned above cannot explain the 3-rd service quality gap without considering trust and commitment, which are endogenous factors. These factors influenced also other organizational quality gaps. Other scholars also add technology-job fit, conflict and ambiguity of roles as potential reasons of the gap 3. Among the suggested solutions allowing to cope with this gap there are: introducing effective internal marketing in an organization, changing the supervisory system, and better employees training (Gronroos 2007: 117).

The fourth major cause of low service quality perceptions is the gap 4 between what a firm promises about a service and what it actually delivers (Zeithaml *et al.* 1990). Service provider's promises form in many ways customers' expectations. A firm might overpromise or misrepresent customers by advertisement announcements, contact personnel information or other marketing activities. Such exaggerated promises might be made due to: the lack of integration and coordination of marketing communication with operations, the organization fails to perform according to specifications, whereas external communication follows these specifications; and people's propensity to promise too much (Gronroos 2007). To avoid this gap an organization should, above all, pay much attention to the advertising campaigns planning, making them accurate and realistic.

The gap model proposed by (Parasuraman *et al.* 1985) demonstrates how service quality emerges (Gronroos 2007). Authors of the model and following commentators in each of four internal quality gaps point the faults and mistakes that might appear in an organization and which cause the gaps. And comprehensive literature review shows that there are a bit fewer guidelines how to operate to avoid quality losses in quality gaps. Authors usually provide general prompts drawn from marketing and service operation guidelines. And there are no direct suggestions how to find and deal with quality gaps in systematic way.

The service quality gaps model shows how the information about customers' expectations has been changing, how the staff's comprehending and perception of customers' requirements have evolved crossing a service organization. The model shows the loop; in this loop there are many losses of what quality is, and what meaning of service quality is expected by customers. Organizational service quality gaps show the cause-effect chain where the quality losses take place. The idea of the five service quality gaps model is to follow the road on which the information about the customers' expectations is carried, being careful of the places where there are dangers of its deformations.

It might be considered that the strongest point of quality gaps concept is that it provides explanation of the process of quality formation inside an organisation; it is a fertile framework that helps managers deeply understand how service quality emerges, it also provides ideas concerning different quality gaps that might occur. It seems that the weak point concerns utilisation of this model in practice; there are not many application guidelines.

## 2.2. Other service quality gaps

Quality gaps may also be identified in internal services in an organization. The useful concept of internal clients (also internal services and internal marketing) is used in total quality management to receive high quality of work outcome and especially to prevent quality losses between processes' stages. Authors identified quality gaps occurring between organization's departments (Auty and Long 1999). There are such gaps as (Auty and Long 1999): (1) the difference between consumer department's knowledge of possible service and supply department's capabilities, (2) the difference between consumer department's expectations of quality and quality standards set for backward and forward linkages in the supply chain strategic goals, (3) the difference between service provider's priorities and the organization's strategic goals and (4) the difference between service delivery promises and resources/authority provided

by organization to fulfil those promises. The quality gaps identified in internal relationships across organization departments are proposed basing on four (Parasuraman *et al.* 1985) gaps. And they show new meaning of organizational quality gaps.

Similarly, other authors researched quality gaps in the context of internal marketing (Bruhn and Georgi 2000). They claim that, taking into consideration staff perception, the lack of appropriate information causes the gaps of quality. They also examined the three gaps driven from the four Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) gaps. And they discovered that the greater asymmetry of staff information, the greater perceived size of quality gaps.

Candido and Morris (2000) propose fourteen quality gaps in a service organization. They identify these gaps basing on literature review, where there are also the four internal gaps of Parasuraman *et al.* (1985), but in gap identification process they assumed more detailed model of typical service organization. This model takes into consideration the elements that were disregarded by other authors, like (Candido and Morris 2000: 465): management's perceptions of customers' perceptions about the service; vision, mission and service strategy; financial and human resources management. Therefore, there were mentioned many additional quality gaps discussed shortly below.

The important quality gap lies in the area of organization's strategy (gap 2 according to Candido and Morris). Service strategy provides a set of essential guidelines that give orientation to staff and managers. Service vision and strategy also imply the ways how an organization tries to prevent and eliminate quality gaps. Much depends on how the strategy is communicated in an organization. The internal communication constitutes the next additional quality gap (gap 5 according to Candido and Morris).

Service systems are considered to be more efficient, then the contact time with customer takes lesser proportion of the whole service process time (Schneider and White 2004). Many important initiatives regarding the customer expectations fulfilment could be cancelled due to financial effectiveness (gap 4 according to Candido and Morris). Two next quality gaps (6,7) are connected with internal coordination between people, activities and departments; and external coordination with subcontractors, suppliers and outscores. The lack of proper coordination and integration causes losses of quality. Seth *et al.* (2006) also mention that there might be many quality gaps in cooperation with suppliers.

Another quality gap (8) arises from the human resources management field. Only appropriate selected and trained staff can meet customers' expectations. The gap relies upon the lack of personnel's skills and motivation. Furthermore, Candido and Morris propose two gaps (gaps 11 and 12 according to them) associated with contact personnel's perception: firstly, perception of customers' expectations, and secondly, perception of customers' experiences. Contact personnel play a key role, especially in non-standard services. Peiro *et al.* (2005) show two different personnel's perception gaps: a gap in functional perception and a gap in relational perception. The final gap (14) is discrepancy in the actual service quality and their assessment in the quality measurement process.

The literature provides more grasps of service quality gaps. Usually they are dedicated for particular service sectors. Zeithaml *et al.* (2002) propose four gaps typical in e-service industry, which are a modification of five original quality gaps by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985). They are: information gap, design gap, communication gap, fulfilment gap. In healthcare service there

were identified fifteen quality gaps. A part of them is similar to those which were mentioned but there are some new ones, very specific for health care services (Nwabueze 2001):

- reliability in service, this gap relies upon the waiting time for procedures and operations in comparison to the promised date;
- service evaluation, but in this proposition it is about not only evaluation of customers but a gap in evaluation of internal process;
- empathy in service, these services are very sensitive to patients' treatment ways by nurses and doctors;
- service responsiveness, responsiveness represents the willingness on the part of staff to help customers and to provide prompt service;
- service tangibles, like an equipment used by hospital personnel that formally is out of use;
- access to service systems.

Gaps that are identified by Nwabueze in health service industry are partly the same as service quality attributes defined by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) in their gap 5. But these gaps are not understood as a customers' expectation-perception discrepancy, but rather as problems that appear in hospital's operations. The proposals of Candido and Morris, also proposals formulated by others for particular service sectors prove that in a service organization there are many different quality gaps, and it depends on particular service activity characteristics.

The wide variety of gaps considered in the literature output is a great collection of hints for services improvement in enterprises. It is useful for companies from such countries like Poland where this concept is still not widely utilised. Moreover, it is expected that some kind of quality gaps might appear as typical for some economy areas, taking into consideration historical background like centrally-planned economy, which left many remains in management style, as well as typical organisational culture.

### 3. Empirical research

Poland, where the research is located still has the economy that in many fields is catching up more developed countries, thus it is suitable to provide a piece of basic information about it. Poland joined EU in 2004, after the few-year period of the adjustment programme that had been established before. After the 1989 when the communistic system collapsed, the Polish economy was changing rapidly, the preparation for EU joining was a strong improvement impulse for the Polish economy. Polish GDP increased more than 5.5% yearly in the last years and there are optimistic forecasts to keep at least the same growth (Wiegert 2007). Service sector is growing rapidly, providing 64.5% of GDP in 2005 (The economy ... 2007). In fact, there is not huge services participation in comparison with other developed countries, but the service industry has great dynamics.

In the investigation process the survey method was employed, research sample was chosen from the whole service industry. The empirical investigation was conducted in three regions of Poland – Podlasie, Mazowsze and Warmia & Mazury. A single firm was the research unit, the inquiries were addressed to a manager (or owner if he/she attends managerial role) from



an enterprise. The research population enclosed 230 service enterprises operating in the three regions of Poland mentioned above, the units were chosen randomly. Instructed researchers visited managers in enterprises and asked them questions based on the questionnaire.

For deeper understanding of the quality gaps phenomenon it is suitable to employ the case study method. This method allows to identify in detailed manner quality gaps in organizations. This might be useful from practical point of view. For case study analysis the objects were visited a few times, the managers were interviewed, the routine operations were observed by the author, and the internal organization documents were analysed.

In the survey investigation the gaps were identified by sixteen (four for each gap) questions prepared basing on suggestions of Zeithaml *et al.* (1990) with Likert's scale 1–5. Beside the questions regarding the four quality gaps, the main service firms' characteristics were gathered, especially those concerning firms' business performance. For business performance variables evaluation the managerial assessment was used.

All main sectors of the service industry were represented in the research sample (according to EU classification 24 sectors were detached specially for this study). Sectors were not represented equally, the largest one that appeared in the sample was the construction and building renovation sector (24 objects) and the smallest – R&D services (only one object) and mineral resources exploitation services (also one object). In the research sample there were mostly small and medium enterprises, those with less than 250 employees constituted 91.5% of the sample.

#### 4. Research achievements

Survey is the main method of this study; it allowed gathering data assessing the size of four quality gaps in a sample of firms. Also other variables were approximated in the research process providing great contribution to the understanding of the role of quality gaps in service quality creation.

##### 4.1. Gaps' size according to the research

In the investigation process it was asked how managers assess each variable, the “5” answer meant that a characteristic described in an item is fully realised in the organization, “1” that definitely not. The gaps were counted by subtracting the received score from the maximum score. The results are shown in Tables 1–4.

Average gap score of four gaps came to 1.12. The score of the smallest gap, gap 3, shows that personnel's work operations are treated relatively desirable. According to the research, the issue of how employees meet the standards introduced by managers is considered as the smallest problem concerning quality losses. Personnel execute service specifications rather well. Paradoxically, managers' assignment, which is standards formulation (gap 2), is treated by them as the worst. The gap of service specification is found as the largest quality gap. Even cursory analysis allows concluding that management level, not realization, from quality losses point of view, is the most important challenge across the researched service enterprises.



**Table 1.** Gap 1 according to the research

Research items (Gap 1)	N	Mean Score	SD	Gap
The managers perfectly understand the customers' expectations	222	4.35	0.873	0.65
The managers encourage contact personnel to share customers' suggestions and opinions	221	4.25	0.967	0.75
Management has frequent face-to-face contact with the contact personnel	221	4.25	1.031	0.75
Marketing research conducted in the company concerns service quality	219	3.09	1.445	1.91
<b>The gap between customers' expectations and managers' perception of customers' expectations</b>		4.00	0.813	1.00

**Table 2.** Gap 2 according to the research

Research items (Gap 2)	N	Mean Score	SD	Gap
All quality standards and specifications introduced in organization perfectly reflect managers' perception of customers' expectations	222	3.55	1.018	1.45
There is the same or stronger pressure on the quality improvement like on the sale of services	226	3.62	1.274	1.38
There are established internal service quality improvement programs	225	3.15	1.449	1.85
There is a formal process for setting service quality goals for employees and their achievement measurement system	222	2.81	1.428	2.19
<b>The gap between managers' perception of customers' expectations and service specifications</b>		3.32	0.996	1.68

**Table 3.** Gap 3 according to the research

Research items (Gap 3)	N	Mean Score	SD	Gap
The service is provided perfectly according to the settled standards and specifications	223	3.91	0.957	1.09
Employees have appropriate skills and predispositions to realize the service well	227	4.42	0.738	0.58
Employees know which aspects of service are particularly important from customers point of view	227	4.33	0.836	0.67
Employees are encouraged to learn new things for better service providing	223	4.19	1.050	0.81
<b>The gap between service specifications and service performance</b>		4.24	0.657	0.76

**Table 4.** Gap 4 and average of four gaps according to the research

Research items (Gap 4)	N	Mean Score	SD	Gap
Advertisement communication and similar perfectly reflect services which are provided	225	4.25	0.927	0.75
Contact personnel have an effect on the advertisement announcements	222	3.64	1.231	1.36
Personnel that are responsible for service sale discuss with contact personnel service quality problems	220	3.74	1.240	1.26
There are competitors in your sector that overpromise to gain new customers	226	3.83	1.370	1.17
<b>The gap between external communication and service performance</b>		3.89	0.824	1.11
<b>Average of four gaps</b>		3.88	0.634	1.12

The issue of how to express managers' perception of customers' expectations in organizational system documents or other kinds of guidelines appears as the most important difficulty (gap 2). In the researched enterprises, apparently, it is a challenge to formulate standards for a service providing process. According to the research in this area of organizations it comes to the largest distortion of customers' requirements and expectations.

Standardization usually consists in explicit rules, policies and procedures governing the work activities, an employee could easily follow the standard operating procedure to accomplish the service goals (Hsieh and Hsieh 2001). Empirical findings show that job standardization exerts a significant effect on service quality (Karatepe *et al.* 2004, Hsieh and Hsieh 2001), usually in the mediation role of employee satisfaction. This proves the significant meaning of standard formulation. But one should take into consideration that in service industry the standardization is considered as difficult.

There is a dilemma concerning the tendency to describe service operations in inflexible standards or make a service flexible and customised to differential customers. It is problematic for service firms to control and manage individual employees' behaviour at the same time, and it is difficult to have a profitable product innovation process when the products cannot be reproduced as mass services (Sundbo 2002). Also service activities have not the same characteristics; they are not liable to standardization equally. Basing on the service standards taxonomy (Blind 2006) it might be stated that three out of five clusters of standards are applicable in the service quality specification field: service employee standards, service delivery standards and customer interaction standards. Job standardisation could clarify work content and context, reduce role ambiguity, decrease role conflict and elucidate the performance standards of the service firm (Hsieh and Hsieh 2001). Moreover, it might have an influence on cost reduction (Nooteboom *et al.* 1992).

The hugest gap among all detailed research items is found in the item "there is a formal process for setting service quality goals for employees and their achievement measurement system" – gap 2. It links directly to the problem of standards formulation, and, moreover, it

gives evidence that HR polices, programs and techniques have not performed properly. The research also uncovered the definite insufficiency of service quality improvement programs in an investigated sample.

There are two more items that draw one's attention. Marketing research does not investigate sufficiently the subjects concerning service quality. The gap score of this research item amounts to 1.95 and it firmly influences the size of gap 1. Next item with relatively large gap score concerns the influence of contact personnel on advertisement announcement. The reason of these gaps might be departmentalization of researched organizations. It seems that there is a lack of flexible structure and cross department cooperation which let people from marketing department and customer service department work together on advertisement campaigns.

#### 4.2. The key service performances measures and quality gaps

In the survey process key service performance variables were assessed as well. In the research questionnaire there were questions regarding overall service quality of the firm (Qual), and the most important business performances: market share changes in the last three years (MarkSh), revenue profitability changes in the last three years (Prof), changes of customers' satisfaction (Sat) and customers loyalty (Loy) also in the last three years. The purpose was not to approximate the absolute levels of those variables, but to assess how they have been changing in the last period. It allows using the scale (1–5) and receiving comparable results. The variables still assess the key service performances but from a dynamic point of view, which is advantageous.

For the statistic analysis the software Statistica 8.0 was employed. The results regarding correlations and the structural equation are shown in Table 5 and Fig. 1.

**Table 5.** Significant correlation coefficients

	Gap 1	Gap 2	Gap 3	Gap 4	Qual	MarkSh	Prof	Sat	Loy
Gap 1	1.0000								
Gap 2	0.5644	1.0000							
Gap 3	0.4401	0.4556	1.0000						
Gap 4	0.4956	0.3823	0.3145	1.0000					
Qual	0.3575	0.2491	0.2666	0.2579	1.0000				
MarkSh		0.1823		0.2410	0.1815	1.0000			
Prof				0.2148		0.6466	1.0000		
Sat	0.1332	0.1862		0.1891	0.2021	0.4268	0.3803	1.0000	
Loy	0.1471	0.1630	0.1794	0.1942	0.1775	0.4352	0.4674	0.6183	1.0000

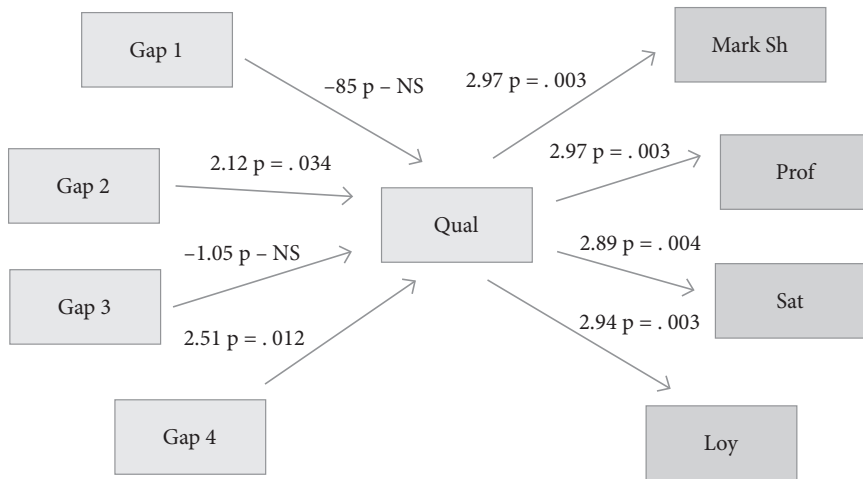


Fig. 1. Path analysis results (NS- not significant)

It was predicted that the quality gaps clearly affect the overall quality of services provided by enterprises. Moreover, the overall service quality influences the key business performances of enterprises. The first prediction had been considered as really highly probable before the research. Surprisingly, as it is shown in Fig. 1, only two out of four gaps have a significant positive impact on the overall service quality – gap 2 and gap 4.

It does not disqualify the quality gaps as a concept explaining how quality emerges in a service organization. The correlation coefficients show that the four quality gaps and service quality remain in relationship. Path analysis (Fig. 1) proved that only larger quality gaps strictly affected the quality, others also present some kinds of relationship (Table 5) but not act linearly. The gap 2 and 4 are found as the larger ones (1.68 and 1.11), and they play the dominant role in service quality creation. It seems that not all quality gaps are equally important for final quality, only the large gaps, which means that large quality losses affect service quality in an important way.

Present research also confirms, in a way coincidentally, that overall service quality has a significant influence (path analysis, Fig. 1) on all key business performances – market share changes, profitability, customers’ satisfaction and loyalty. Structural equation analysis shows the relationship of organizational quality gaps with key organization performance mediated by overall quality. It proved quality gaps concept to be reliable, which makes it worth to focus attention on this problem. Finally, we may consider that the relationships of companies’ profit and other key competitiveness indicators with service quality gaps is crowning argument for managers to focus on service quality gaps and their elimination. The limitation of this study is that customers’ point of view was not considered, but it was not possible in this scale of research sample.

## 5. Education and IT services

Foregoing research proves that there are differences between quality gaps – the differences in the size and role. Literature review shows that also other gaps might be found in service organization, which, in an important way, might affect quality losses. Therefore, it was decided to conduct a deep case studies of two organizations from the education and IT service sectors. The case studies let us learn what kinds of service quality gaps in studied organizations exist. Only the main observations and conclusions identified in analyses will be presented.

A university was chosen as the representation of education sector, one of public universities in the region where the research was conducted. Higher education services provided by universities are peculiar; its quality should be gauged in terms of its impact on students' growth; growth and development in a holistic sense, incorporating not just intellectual growth, but social, emotional and cultural development as well (Tam 2002).

In the analysed university at least eleven typical quality gaps were identified. In the understanding and identification process the literature output and informal discussions with the managers were helpful. Some of identified gaps are the same or very similar to proposed by (Parasuraman *et al.* 1985), but some are peculiar and probably characteristic only for organizations in this service sector. And these require more attention.

The higher education process lasts a long time, in the whole career a customer takes the advantage of the study he/she graduated. The higher education service should be fitted to the future labour market requirements. Then one quality gap consists in the understanding of the present and future labour market needs, as well as directions of civilisation changes.

The education performs many purposes, among which one can find social and cultural development. Regardless of formal syllabus a lecture might be provided in many ways. There is the gap of particular skills and educational abilities, abilities to involve students – a kind of intellectual and social leadership. No one can enclose it in the specification or standards. This gap includes proper staff recruitment.

There are also quality gaps between formal guidelines and 'translating' them into operation service specifications. Strategy and documents pointing improvement directions set by faculties' boards, and also directives forced by accreditation institutions are all interpreted in specific ways and make opportunity to originate quality gaps.

The analysis of this case shows that in education service specifications like study programs and syllabuses, it must be admitted, are important but main success factor for high quality lies in appropriate staff and university organization culture. Moreover, it was mentioned by disputants that the fourth quality gap by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) does not exist on public universities. The communication about services is going around as social opinions and words of mouths.

From IT sector the company that provides solutions for business purposes was chosen. They prepare software dedicated to individual business problems: sale modules, CRM tools, mobile solutions in a sale area, and other tools that supported management. The company employs more than one hundred people.

The deep analysis shows that the first gap by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985), here emerges in the process of contracts negotiation. This is specific for the kind of services provided by this

company. In a contract negotiation stage the clients' expectations become known. Beside this, as managers announced, the company tries to have an influence on clients' expectations. Clients often do not understand precisely what they could expect. Therefore, the contract's establishing is the time when clients are informed and educated about a detailed service opportunity. In fact, the gap of contracts establishment combines three gaps by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985): gap 1 – expectations understanding, gap 2 – specifications formulation and gap 4 – external communication about services.

In spite of detailed contract's settlements usually there are contradictions in a contract's interpretation in both, the company and clients. It is the source of serious quality losses. The next gap concerns internal communication and coordination in the executive stage of IT projects. It causes many faults and delays, which clients usually do not expect and accept.

To summarise, it should be underlined that the originally identified by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) four organizational service quality gaps appear in each case study in some different manner. They have different role and nature – gap 4 in an education organization appears as not important, in IT service gap 1, 2 and 4 appear together. Case analysis proves that the general model of five service quality gaps needs to be adjusted to a particular service environment, needs to be made more detailed. Also new kinds of quality gaps must be identified. Then, this process of detailed quality gaps identification, taking into consideration the original model, might make the service quality gaps concept more useful in practice.

## 6. Conclusions

Present study confirms the Gronroos' opinion (2007) that the gap analysis model should guide management in finding out where the reason (or reasons) for the quality problems lie and in discovering appropriate ways to close the gap. It is a useful concept that might be helpful in management practice.

A special attention should be paid to the problems of service specifications formulation. It appears as the main quality gap which firmly causes quality losses. Also the external communication emerges as important reasons of quality losses.

But also it should be concluded that each service organization needs to analyse carefully their own specific quality gaps, preferably beginning from customers' expectations and customers' complaints. Then the concept will be really useful in management. And still there is a lack of guidelines dedicated exactly to quality gaps, namely how to deal with gaps that were identified in an organization. The literature output of the field of quality management proposes a very useful solution to cope with the quality problems that appear in neuralgic points in processes, which might be helpful in dealing with service quality gaps.

The quality gaps approach can be applied in a service organization in a similar manner like HACCP system in food industry. It is a food safety system that is adopted mainly to win customers' trust. These systems allow firms to partition, allocate, control, and reduce risks throughout the value chain (Caduff and Bernauer 2006: 158). In a service organization, as in HACCP, first it is needed to identify and define critical points – quality gaps, next define what should be done and by whom to eliminate or minimize to an acceptable level quality losses in gaps. Not always directly measurable standards are required (in HACCP are) but

it is necessary to understand clearly the goals in all points. Next, one should decide how to monitor quality gaps points. And, finally, one should set up a documented system.

There is only an idea how managers might deal with service quality gaps. To achieve more useful and precise hints further researches are required. Besides, the direction of further research is the problem of service specification formulation and standardization. There is a need of methods of standardization; the role of IT technology utilization, mobile technology, internet interfaces might have a great potential to provide many advantages in this field.

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## PASLAUGŲ KOKYBĖS PROBLEMOS IR JŲ VAIDMUO PASLAUGŲ TEIKIMO ĮMONIŲ PLĖTRAI

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamos organizacinės kokybės problemos. Čia apžvelgiama daugelis paslaugų kokybės problemų, bet tiriamos tik keturios iš penkių (pagal Parasuraman *et al.* 1985). Tyrimų duomenys rodo, jog pagrindinė problema yra skirtumas tarp to, kaip klientų lūkesčius supranta vadybininkai ir kaip organizacijoje yra apibūdinamos paslaugos. Taigi daugiausia kokybės problemų kyla planuojant paslaugas. Vadybiniu požiūriu yra labai naudinga nustatyti kokybės problemas.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** paslaugų valdymas, paslaugų kokybė, paslaugų kokybės problemos.

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