

# **Service Quality Measurement Methods – Evaluation, Practical Application, Perspectives**

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## **Abstract**

Service is a crucial part of economic activity, especially for Small and Medium Enterprises (SME). Due to the needs of customers, service companies use various methods and managing strategies to raise the level of their competitiveness. Quality management and methods relating to it are still a vital problem for service companies. This issue is of paramount importance for researchers worldwide. Growing importance of quality management is related to higher demand a service has to meet on more and more competitive market. Globalization processes are also crucial.

The quality management in services sector has been researched in many different countries from the eighties. In Poland, because of the transformation connected with abandonment of the communistic system, the quality management in service activities has become the object of the true interest of service enterprises from the end of the nineties.

Service is quite demanding when providing proper quality is discussed. It is due to certain characteristic features of this particular field of human activity. One of the key issues of quality management is service quality measurement and methods applied in the process. Nowadays there are numerous quality measurement methods, each making an assumption as to what service quality is. Available methods have their benefits and drawbacks. Their application differs from one service company to another (especially as regards small companies).

The article presents quality measurement methods assessment with particular focus on their specificity and usefulness in management practice. It also focuses on empirical research which shows diverse usefulness of these methods in measurement. Besides, relevance of searching for other methods that would be more suitable for managers is discussed. In the “conclusion” section certain guidelines have been formulated which relate to further research on service quality measurement methods.

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## **Introduction**

The service sector, which provides added value and absorbs more human resources, is subject to constant dynamic changes. These changes (increasing investments between regions, widespread computerization) make it more difficult for small service companies to avoid competition remaining hidden behind their position on the local markets. Competitors' actions become more intensive and new companies set new rules of competing. Franchising chains and Internet services start to take customers from small local companies.

Quality is crucial due to dynamic changes, e.g. thanks to high quality, service companies retain their position on the market and gain advantage over competitors. However, service quality has its own characteristics. There are few distinctive features of service quality management which differentiate it from goods. The role of the people providing certain services and difficulty in precise service quality measurement are crucial here.

Service quality measurement has been intensively studied from the second half of 1980's. In Poland, due to political changes and switching from communism, it has been studied from the end of 1990's.

Nowadays there are some proven service quality measurement methods, but they do not always meet the needs of managers dealing with services. Moreover, there is a slow trend of learning about practical application of service quality measurement methods among small and medium enterprises.

The article aims to review currently available service quality measurement methods, with particular consideration of doubts and weaknesses which are presented in specialist literature. The review of quality measurement methods and their strengths and weaknesses allow to formulate a hypothesis that managers need service quality measurement methods which would be more useful in their profession. The scope of quality measurement methods usage by Polish service organizations of different trades has been verified in empirical research.

### **Disconfirmation Model – Servqual and Its Limitations**

From specialist literature analysis Servqual is the best known and most frequently applied service quality measurement method. It is used in various research, tested by many researchers, it is also frequently modified. The literature mentions various drawbacks of this method.

Servqual is a method of measuring discrepancy between a customer's expectations for a service offering and the customers' perception of the service received. This method is frequently described as a disconfirmation model. Disconfirmation is a negative test of an assumption<sup>1</sup>. It consists in research on customers using a questionnaire comprising of two parts<sup>2</sup> - a part of customer's expectations and a part of service quality evaluation. The research tool has 22 precise criteria describing five service quality dimensions: (1) material dimension of service quality, (2) reliability of the service provided, (3) responsiveness towards customer's expectations, (4) assurance that the company and its employees provide high standard of service, (5) caring the organisation provides its customers (Parasuraman et al. 1988, p. 23). A seven-point Likert scale has been used to measure both expectations and perception. The two parts of the questionnaire use the same criteria and scale. After subtracting "expectations" from "perception" the result is a disconfirmation degree, i.e. a degree of choosing the wrong service to customer's expectation. According to the creators of this method it can be used widely in service and retail companies to measure customers' expectations and perception of the service provided (Parasuraman et al. 1988, p.36).

Servqual is not the only tool for quality measurement which uses the disconfirmation model. For example, it was used in banking services quality measurement, but the model was modified. Six banking services quality dimensions were used: (1) competence, (2) responsiveness, (3) reliability, (4) safety, (5) understanding, (6) communication (Bahia, Nantel 2000, p. 87). They were subdivided into 31 criteria. The disconfirmation gap was not measured in two steps, but through

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<sup>1</sup> [www.encyklopedia.servis.pl](http://www.encyklopedia.servis.pl) entry "disconfirmation", March 2007.

<sup>2</sup> The first version of Servqual did not take weighted index into consideration (Parasuraman et al. 1998, pp. 12-40) but in subsequent publications the method has a third part of a questionnaire in which respondents allot one hundred points to each of five quality dimensions, thus stating their importance (Zeithaml et al. pp. 191-198).

expectations and perception assessment for each criterion simultaneously. This method proved to be more adequate than Servqual method.

Servqual has been tested in empirical research, hence there are numerous critical observations. Criticism shows some imperfections of this method, but on the other hand it proves how complex the matter of service quality measurement is.

As Sureshchandar, Rajendran and Kamalanabhan have pointed out, the Servqual method omits certain important aspects of service quality like service product, service product core, service providing standardization, company image, social responsibility of a company providing a service (Sureshchandar et al. 2003, p. 112). There are also authors who claim that quality dimensions of Servqual are inadequate for actual quality dimensions in various service trades (Wetzels et al. 2000, p. 309, Moore, Schlegelmilch 1994, pp. 83-92; Cronin, Taylor 1992, pp. 55-68; Barman 1990, pp. 33-55). Many researchers tried to modify the criteria either by adding or removing some of them, thus adapting the method to specific service conditions they were examining (Morrison, Coulthard 2004, p. 481). Another problem lays in the meaning of separate criteria. Servqual is based on an unjustified assumption that the criteria in question are equally important (Oppewal, Vriens 2000, p. 156).

The disconfirmation model, on which the Servqual method is based, also has its drawbacks. Contractors and quality analysts state that transactors providing services in typical conditions are not able to meet customers' demands fully and particularly the ones stated by them directly (Rosen et al. 2003, p. 11). It is usually the case that customers expect far more than a company has to offer.

The disconfirmation model does not show the whole concept of service quality, it is merely one of the problem's conceptualizations. As Cronin and Taylor's research shows, examining customers' attitudes conveys the idea of quality better than gaps (Cronin, Taylor 1992, pp. 55-69). Besides, Dabholkar, Shepherd and Thorpe basing on their research state that there is strong evidence that perception measurement is better than the disconfirmation model to measure service quality (Dabholkar et al. 2000, p. 167).

Lisa Morrison Coulthard's opinion serves best as a conclusion. She states that the problem related to this method may be more complex than it is widely regarded (Morrison Coulthard 2004, p.491). Many authors call for creating better service quality measurement methods and propose their own approaches free from limitations of the Servqual method<sup>3</sup>.

### **Customer's Perception Measurement – Servperf and Other Methods**

There are many doubts as to whether it is right to measure quality using disconfirmation. In comparative research which compare measurement using disconfirmation and using quality perception, the latter shows to be more adequate. The part of Servqual questionnaire used to measure only quality perception is called Servperf (Cronin, Taylor 1994, pp. 125-132). The same 22 categories characterising quality are used. Service quality index is calculated as a sum of points resulting from e.g. five-point Likert scale. Similarly as in Servqual, weighted and non-weighted indexes are measured.

Service quality measurement using only customers' perception assessment is more frequently used by the researchers (Jain, Gupta 2004, pp. 25-37; Marshall,

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<sup>3</sup> For example in Wetzels et al. 2000, p. 309 and Bennington, Cummane 1998, p. 398.

Smith 2000, pp. 45-58; Brady et al. 2002, pp. 17-31; Cronin et al. 2000, pp. 193-218) and is analysed and evaluated. Measurement using Servperf or another method basing on perception evaluates the degree of company's perfection in meeting certain needs as to service quality. This kind of measurement is criticised for not being able to show the scale of customers' expectations towards companies' adjustments to their needs. There is certain data basing on which it is concluded that both approaches – Servqual and Servperf – have their drawbacks and benefits, particularly in practical application. Servperf is better to present satisfaction and general service quality diversity, whereas Servqual proves to be more useful in indicating service imperfections. Servqual brings managers as much data as Servperf and much more (Elliott 1994, p.59).

Servperf, which was originally created as an alternative for Servqual, is only one of many quality measurement methods basing on customers' perception. The literature presents various tools to examine separate services. These tools differ mostly in quality assessment criteria. Assessment criteria are always created by authors depending on which quality attributes they see crucial in a given service. Moreover, they are related to accepted assumptions as to what they understand as "service quality". Various measurement tools, apart from using different quality attributes, have diverse measurement scales. Special research questionnaires created by companies for their own use are a good example of such tools measuring perceived quality through measuring customers' perception. It seems that all these tools are created as a result of difficulty in formulating a universal set of attributes characterising service quality.

One of the most interesting approaches of this kind, which presents a totally new understanding of how customers evaluate services, is the Sq-Need method. This method is based on Maslow's theory of needs which helped to build a quality assessment tool which takes human needs into account. The Sq-Need tool has 33 criteria describing seven aspects of service quality according to Maslow's pyramid. It states that customers evaluate service quality by meeting psychological, safety, affiliation etc. needs. Human needs, according to the creators of the method, allow to derive the following service quality components: (1) comfort, (2) adjustment, (3) responsiveness, (4) innovation, (5) ability to learn (Hung-Chang Chiu, Neng-Pai Lin 2004, p.192). The Sq-Need method may be particularly useful in certain services like education, concerts, museums, or transmitting information (Hung-Chang Chiu, Neng-Pai Lin 2004, p.201).

Basing on the two major components of human psyche – cognitive and affective components – it is possible to build a tool for service quality measurement (Hung-Chang Chiu 2002, pp. 265-274).

Some of the proposed attributes which characterise service quality are an attempt of synthesis and generalisation. Isolating some service quality attributes ((1) service core, (2) human element in providing service, (3) systematizing service – non-human elements, (4) material components – the space of service providing, (5) social responsibility) is an important proposal which takes the most frequently used approach to quality dimensions (used in Servqual) into consideration, but also the Nordic school achievements in quality research (Sureshchandar et al. 2003, p. 116). The authors created a tool for practical assessment of quality. The tool was based on the aforementioned dimensions. However, it was not tested by them. Although this proposal does not meet the requirement of being universal, it certainly gets nearer to the ideal.

## **Incident-Based Quality Measurement**

Assessment which is based on constant criteria has one disadvantage – it assumes that certain attributes characterising quality are valid. Respondents fill questionnaires in stating their expectations, sharing perception of service, but they do so within certain criteria. The fact handicaps this type of methods. This particular limitation is even more visible when service diversity is discussed, which takes place even within one trade, also customer's service perception individual character and diversity.

Critical Incident Technique (CIT) has been widely discussed by Flanagan (Flanagan 1954, pp. 327-358). In this method respondents are asked questions which allow to identify critical incidents which took place in relation to service. Incidents are treated as critical when a respondent is able to state with considerable certainty the intentions of incident participants and when the incident has been observed as a whole, with its consequences (Sautter, Hanna 1995, p.33). Critical incidents are those which occur between customers and personnel and which lead to satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Bitner et al. 1990, p.73). Incidents may be related to problems while service realization and their subsequent reparation by contractor (Johnston 1995, pp. 53-72). The method assumes that customers will remember the completely positive and completely negative incidents (Stauss 1993, pp. 408-427).

In each of the research discussed in the literature, respondents were asked slightly different questions, but always these were open questions aimed at receiving information on the most important incidents which were remembered. Questions may be as follows: (1) what incident occurred? (2) what particular circumstances lead to it? (3) what did employees say/do? (4) what factors influenced your satisfaction/dissatisfaction (Johnson 2002, p.3)? Incidents descriptions may be supplemented with various criteria with appropriate measure scales which help in characterising (Lockshin, McDougall 1998, p.438). Once incidents have been gathered, they are grouped and counted. Positive and negative incidents number indicates quantitative assessment of the measured service quality.

The method is a compromise between standard assessment structure and free customers descriptions (Sautter, Hanna 1995, p.33). It allows to get information on how customers perceive a service, which is of paramount importance for the managers. It is quite frequently the case that the CIT method gives clear instructions what steps should be taken (Gronroos 2003, p.79). Due to the fact that it requires certain effort from respondents, the research process gives more information on behaviour, which other methods lack (Sautter, Hanna 1995, p.33). It also requires little preparation, which is beneficial (De Saram et al. 2004, p.98), but its practical application takes more time and effort.

It should be emphasised that this method does not impose any quality or service quality model definitions. Instead it allows customers to express themselves freely (De Saram et al. 2004, p.98). However, its application in systematic service quality monitoring seems questionable.

## **Quality Measurement Using Service Providing Process**

The point of departure for service quality measurement may also be the service providing process. Different phases of this process have different nature and are

related to various conditioning. “Service providing process” in service quality measurement methods is usually understood as a process which a customer undergoes during service realization. Quality assessment is based on identification of separate cognition phases of service providing processes.

The basis of such approach to service quality measurement is the customer – company relation during service providing/consumption. This relation has three components: sequences, episodes and acts; as seen by some authors<sup>4</sup>. Sequences are service providing phases which may be understood as service providing process phases. According to Liljander and Strandvik, an episode is e.g. a visit in a bank to discuss loan conditions and an act is meeting a credit and loans officer in a bank during visit (Gronroos 2003, p.96). The whole banking service consists of phases which, in turn, are consisted of several episodes. Granting a loan would then be a phase.

Stauss and Weinlich, having accepted this understanding of service providing/consumption, propose Sequential Incident Technique (SIT) method to measure service quality. It uses measuring incidents in the service providing process (Stauss, Weinlich 1997, pp. 33-55). The SIT method uses many techniques from the CIT method. Service quality measurement is based on examining customers who describe incidents from each phase of service providing. Unlike in CIT, it records all incidents, not only the critical ones. Every incident's importance is graded by respondents on a scale, thanks to which it is possible to distinguish critical and non-critical incidents. During interviews respondents discuss a visualised course of the service process and answer questions related to separate phases. Incidents are also marked positive or negative.

The authors have examined tourist services using their method and it proved to be a success. It allowed to create quantitative accounts which may be treated as service quality index. According to authors, gathering all incidents – also the non-critical ones – in the SIT method is especially useful in quality planning and in marketing (Johnson 1995, p.8).

Quality measurement based on the service providing process uses systemic approach, according to which a system consists of entries, processes and leaves (Johnson 1995, p.8). The literature also mentions another method of quality measurement based on the systemic approach, which uses customers' perception assessment according to service attributes. Together with other authors Johnson has singled out 20 research criteria assessed on a five-point Likert scale, taking into consideration service entry (5 criteria, e.g. reputation, equipment), service providing process (7 criteria, e.g. responsiveness during service providing), and leave (8 criteria, e.g. whether or not a service met the expectations) (Johnson 1995, p. 12). Authors have also evaluated how much the service is useful in various types of services. Results have proven that different quality attributes mentioned by customers refer in 39% to entries, 45% to service process and 16% to leaves; authors have concluded that it further confirms systemic approach use in service quality measurement (Johnson 1995, p.15). The approach which uses the process creates new possibilities in service quality measurement development – it can be used both with quality attributes and separate incidents. It seems that there are not many researchers who would advocate this approach, despite its huge practical benefits.

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<sup>4</sup> Relation divided into three components: acts, episodes and sequences can be found in Gronroos 2003, p. 82.

## **Mystery Shopping as a Service Quality Measurement Method**

Among numerous definitions of quality, the one put forward by Crosby is of key importance. According to the definition, quality is understood as being free from any flaws, being in compliance with accepted standards (Crosby 1979). In order to measure service quality which has been defined as above, a participating and non-participating observation method may be used, namely the Mystery Shopping method.

During the observation, the researcher who pretends to be a customer follows a readymade research pattern to measure different aspects of the service in question with particular focus on personnel and material aspects of the service. The researcher may also simulate certain unpredictable difficult situations so as to measure service quality.

Some practitioners who favour Mystery Shopping emphasize that this is a process which provides feedback understood for linear employees who perform the service<sup>5</sup> (Erstad 1998, p.34). Thus, the key elements are observations of real incidents typical for a given service, not generalized descriptions characterising quality attributes. It has to be added that there is scientific research in which Mystery Shopping observation guidelines have been elaborated originating from service quality dimensions and separate criteria used in Servqual (Cuganesan 1997, pp. 161-181). However, these researchers have introduced many changes to the original set of criteria.

Mystery Shopping observation allows avoiding potential drawbacks of interviews and polls. (Wilson 2001, p. 722). When one scaled aspect of a service is researched, reliability of the data gathered using the method is far higher than data gathered through interviews (Finn, Kayandé 1999, p.214). Researchers show many advantages of the Mystery Shopping method over interviews (Wilson 1998, p. 148). The discrepancy between what customers say during interviews and what they actually do is one of the interview method drawbacks. From time to time it happens that customers' answers on a questionnaire are not reflected in their behaviour. Moreover, sometimes facts can be revealed only in real-life conditions. Respondents are not aware of them, so it is difficult to measure using only questions. Additionally, it has been concluded that respondents' verbal capacity limits data quality and quantity.

Not much is said in the literature on the problem of subjective impressions of "secret observers". Many aspects depend on proper preparation of researchers. Some authors raise the doubts of ethical matters (Ng Kwet Swing, Spence 2002, pp. 343-353) concerning e.g. whether or not it is justified to observe people doing their duties in the places of work not having informed them about the fact. There are other doubts which emerge from some practises used in this method.

## **Service Quality Measurement from the Inside of an Organization**

Vast majority of service quality measurement methods discussed in the literature assumes that the customer is the right subject to assess service quality. However, organizations also measure other service quality aspects which are not

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<sup>5</sup> Mystery Shopping evaluation by Roger Mayland, vice-chairman of Martiz's Quality Controlled Services Division.

related to customers' perception. Especially the Six Sigma systems are important here. Process measurement is the key element where many kinds of quality measures are used simultaneously. Measurement (M) is the second of five basic steps used in Six Sigma - DMAIC<sup>6</sup>. Six Sigma quality measurements mostly deal with (1) defects occurring in processes together with other key parameters measurement (Yang 2005; Bure 2003) and (2) "the voice of the customer" (Rylander, Provost 2006, p.15), whose identification is done through perceived quality and satisfaction measurement.

As refers to service providing process measurement, time of service operation is crucial, e.g. time between customer's arrival and being serviced, or between separate phases of the service (Yang 2005; Bure 2003, p.35), etc. Additionally, Six Sigma measures quantity of various mistakes which occur during service realization. Six Sigma aims at limitation inconsistency between what customers see and feel (Rylander, Provost 2006, p.14) and this limitation can refer only to parameters which have been measured and stated quantitatively.

Complaints recording and analysis is of paramount importance in service defects measurement. It should be treated as one of service quality assessment measures. Some companies, especially B2B ones, focus mainly on them. They have special assessments for customers, which allow proper reaction on defects and subsequent measurement of the defects by costs (Kasper et al. 2006, p.207). Complaints data is a measure of service perfection and proper reaction to them is a great way of raising service quality.

### **Empirical Research Method**

The aforementioned analysis shows that service quality measurement methods used nowadays are not perfect yet. Each one has an assumption as to what service quality is. It needs to be mentioned that definitely each method, when appropriately applied, will prove beneficial for a company. Researchers have tried to assess to what extent service quality measurement methods are used and whether managers require methods that would be more adapted to their needs and expectations. Doubts raised by many researchers and drawbacks which are mentioned frequently allow posing such a question.

Research has been carried out on a group of randomly chosen service organizations. The research sample has been drawn from companies operating in Podlaskie and neighbouring regions. The research is not statistically representative. A research questionnaire which was filled in by participating managers was used. Trained researchers visited them personally and 223 reliable questionnaires have been gathered.

All service trade companies were in the research sample (according to the Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community – NACE, there were 24 trades and "others" section) and a few public service organizations. These were various companies, but, according to the character of service activity, mostly small and medium enterprises – ones with less than 250 employees were 91.5% of the research sample. Service quality measurement assessment was one of many parts of a larger research project.

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<sup>6</sup> Based on Yang 2005, p.17: D – define customer's problem and expectations, M – measure defects and check processes, A – analyse data, locate the source of the problem, I – improve the process by eliminating causes of defects, C – control the process by reassuring that defects are permanently removed.



## Knowledge and Practice of Service Quality Measurement Methods

Using service quality measurement methods in practise was the key question in the research questionnaire. Respondents were asked to mark the methods on a scale: “currently used”, “known, but not used” and “rather unknown”. The results are presented in Table 1. The questionnaire involved the main methods discussed in the literature. There was also blank space for other methods to fill in, but respondents did not use it. Basing on preliminary qualitative pilot study researchers decided to put “customers’ satisfaction research” category, mainly due to the fact that it was noted that organizations treat customers’ satisfaction assessment very seriously and identify it with service quality assessment. Placing service quality benchmarking was an exceptionally good idea. Benchmarking is not widely discussed in specialist literature with regard to service quality measurement methods. Preliminary research has proven that service managers do compare their service quality with the one of others using various techniques, most frequently personal observation.

**Table 1. Knowledge and Practice of Service Quality Measurement Methods**

	currently used	known, but not used	percentage of users	percentage of applying the method regarding knowledge
Customers’ complaints recording and analysis	171	42	76.7%	80.3%
Perceived quality research according to own assessment questionnaire	109	79	48.9%	58.0%
Service quality-based organization processes measurement	72	98	32.3%	42.4%
Systematic service quality benchmarking	72	77	32.3%	48.3%
Mystery Shopping quality research	37	104	16.6%	26.2%
Critical Incident Technique	6	63	2.7%	8.7%
Servqual method	2	43	0.9%	4.4%
Customers’ satisfaction research	138	66	61.9%	67.6%

Research results show that the best service quality measurement method is direct listening of “the voice of the customer” by the managers. It seems that this is the least complicated and one of the most efficient methods. Organizations do not employ sophisticated methodologies, they build systems allowing recording customers’ opinion in an original way, thus applying it to their needs. The minimal

use of CIT and Servqual is significant. Low degree of using these methods according to the degree of their knowledge (8.7 % and 4.4% respectively) shows that they are perceived as inefficient or that there are other barriers limiting their application (it is difficult to state the barriers due to insufficient data).

### Reasons for Creating New Methods

Due to the drawbacks of service quality measurement methods discussed in specialist literature, the questionnaire asks about two crucial issues: (1) are the available methods useful and efficient enough from the point of view of a manager and (2) do managers see the need of creating new methods, more adapted to their expectations. Answers were given on a five-point Likert scale from an extreme “no” to an extreme “yes” (Table 2).

**Table 2. Used Methods’ Assessment and Expectations Towards the Applicable Ones**

	no/rather not	yes/rather yes	no/rather not	yes/rather yes
			percentage in the researched group	
Are your service quality measurement methods useful and meet current needs of organization management?	25	141	11.2%	63.2%
Should better service quality measurement methods be created?	69	96	30.9%	43.0%

The service organizations that were researched have spoken highly of the current service quality measurement methods – 63.2% positive answers. The same organizations have expressed expectations that more suitable methods will be created. Hence, although satisfactory results were received, the methods are still far from being perfect. Another thing proving this opinion is the analysis of this particular feature (expectation towards the method) correlation with other features characterising the researched group (Table 3).

**Table 3. Correlations and Relevance Coefficients**

<b>Features of the researched group</b>	<b>Is there a need for new, better service quality measurement methods?</b>	
	<b>correlation coefficient</b>	<b>probability</b>
Number of employees	0.2878	p=0.000
Evaluation of the role of formalized quality systems (e.g. ISO 9000) and TQM	0.28	p=0.000
Evaluation of the role of processes management, monitoring (measurement) of service providing processes	0.2743	p=0.000
Evaluation of the role of statistical tools and quality management tools, e.g. Pareto analysis, correlation analysis, QFD, FMEA	0.273	p=0.000
Is quality perceived according to own assessment questionnaire researched?	0.2143	p=0.002
Are quality processes in the company measured?	0.1907	p=0.005
Is customers' satisfaction measured?	0.1539	p=0.025
Are service quality indexes measured systematically?	0.1391	p=0.043

Values of correlation coefficients with a given feature are not high. Levels of importance are key factors which inform that features from the table remain in statistical correlation with expectations of more applicable methods. The identified correlations refer to four characteristics of the researched group: (1) number of employees, (2) the role of quality management methods declaration, (3) service quality measurement methods that are used and (4) systematic measurement of the indexes.

Firstly, it has to be stated that expectations of new methods derive rather from larger subjects; the correlation suggests that the bigger the subject, the bigger the interest in new service measurement methods. This relation can be explained that the bigger the organization, the stronger the need for effective quality assessment methods and big organizations cannot rely merely on intuitive assessment. Demand is also voiced by companies which price quality management methods and systems. Moreover, expectations are accompanied by using quality measurement methods which are currently available. This is important information, stating that managers, who are experienced in using some methods, are the ones who formulate the need for better quality measurement methods. Furthermore, companies which systematically monitor their services' quality are in need of new methods too. Having analysed the interdependence of the features, an important conclusion can be drawn that more advanced companies in quality management need more sophisticated methods.

No significant correlation between trades was seen. It was predictable since there were 25 categories and a trade has a character of a nominal variable. Regardless of that, a set has been made (Table 4) presenting trades represented by 10 and more subjects in which more than half positive answers were noted.

**Table 4. Answer to the Question Regarding Expectations of More Sophisticated Methods in Separate Branches**

<b>Is there a need for more sophisticated service quality measurement methods?</b>				
	<b>no/rather not</b>	<b>yes/rather yes</b>	<b>participation yes/rather yes</b>	<b>numerical strength of the trade</b>
Construction	9	14	51.9%	27
Transport	8	12	52.2%	23
Other services (including e.g. hairdressing, drycleaning), NACE 93...	3	12	54.5%	22
Wholesale, commission	7	11	55.0%	20
Education	6	7	50.0%	14
Car sale, repair, service, fuel sale	2	6	54.5%	11
Telecommunications, postal services	2	5	50.0%	10

Analysis of the data regarding expectations of better service quality measurement methods indicates service importance on the B2B market – services of this kind are found in constructions and transport. This should be researched further. Additionally, expectations are high in services with influence of human factor and ones which are developing rapidly – in education and telecommunications.

## **Conclusion**

A lot of proposals about service quality measurement methods or their modifications refer to the last several years, what proves researchers' reactions on the practical needs. The extent of Servqual, CIT and similar methods' use shows that these methods do not meet the organizations' needs. And finally the answer to the directly asked question about the need of the most suitable methods shows that there is some area in the scope of research for creative suggestions.

Direction of research should not rather assume that it is possible to define some constant group of service quality dimensions/attributes. Quality attributes vary in time and their quantity depending on the approach can be constantly created<sup>7</sup>. It is confirmed by the criticism of attribute-based methods, it is also affirmed by the diversification of service quality attributes in proposals of quality measurement methods adjusted to particular trades.

That being so, the service quality measurement method which is based on free attributes research scheme may be more useful. This scheme would be individually

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<sup>7</sup> Similar opinion found in Schneider, White 2004, p.40.

matched to every researched service. So a configurable research scheme may be better than “stiff” attributes measurement.

The experience of many researchers and the review of available methods force to pay attention to the service providing process. This is emphasised by the authors of more sophisticated service quality measurement methods (De Saram et al. 2004, p.99). Focusing on the process is becoming more important in quality management. The last modification of ISO 9001:2000 is good evidence.

Easiness of the method's use in current benchmarking should also be noticed. The integration of service quality outlook by the customers and from the inside of the service organization is also important. The disadvantage of perceived quality measurement is that the assessment of quality is done as if it has already been completed. So the connection of previous quality and perceived quality predicates within the organization may be important.

It was not the result of research due to the fact the matter was not within the assumptions, but the use of different methods can have some connection with the cultural context. Managers from certain cultures may expect methods which are more comprehensible for special mentality. So it may happen that there is a need not only for literal translation of the research tools into a national language, but also a further adjustment in order to be more understandable and adequate to a particular community.

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