CUSTOMER SERVICE QUALITY IN B2B MARKET FROM THE BUYER'S PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. The importance of services for companies is significant and still increasing. Customers expect fulfilment of their requirements concerning not only the product, but also the quality of services relating to this product. The core of competitiveness is thus moving from the product itself to the supplier abilities created by the entire supply system with a dynamic structure. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the specific needs of each single customer concerning services within the entire supply system. On the basis of a comparison of the outcomes of a targeted literature review and an analysis of evaluation of the service quality by the customers purchasing products of a selected company, the paper identifies the deciding parameters and methods of customer service quality assessment in the B2B market from the buyer's perspective.

Keywords: customer service, service quality, parameters of service quality, service quality assessment, B2B.

JEL Classification: L80, L69, O14, M31.

1. Introduction

Manufacturing companies find it more and more difficult to differentiate physical products, and so they more and more often resort to differentiation through services. Any added valuable services may become, together with an increase in their quality, the key to acquiring a competitive advantage (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Firms were adding service to their offering as a means of increasing competitiveness,turnover, and market power (Kowalkowski, Gebauer, Kamp, & Parry, 2017a). Customers of capital goods (B2B) are demanding more value from their suppliers. Therefore increasingly suppliers offer value added services to enhance the performance of their core product in the customers'value system. Manufacturers of capital goods are organizing themselves to deliver services and 'integrated solution offerings' that combine both physical products and services (Brax & Visintin, 2017). The processs of servitization is evolving, from a point where firms considered their offering in terms of goods or services, through goods and services, to the marketing of bundles of goods + services + support + knowledge + selfservice (Kowalkowski, Gebauer, & Oliva, 2017b).

The quality of provided services is considered one of the most important elements of development and sustaining effective and successful relationships within supply systems and a key factor of corporate competitiveness in the B2B market (Benazic & Dosen, 2012), among others in the context of corporate social responsibility concept implementation (Tetrevova, 2018). It also makes a significant contribution to creating a positive corporate reputation (Jelinkova & Lostakova, 2016). Therefore, its enhancement is one of the most popular strategies of current companies (Czajkowska & Stasiak-Betlejewska, 2015).

Services are delivered in interactions between human representatives of the service provider and buying company and thus difficult to produce with consistent characteristics and quality.This complicates to standardize, count, and value them (Lindberg & Nordin, 2008). It is generally believed that increased collaboration among supply chain participants leads to lower total cost and enhanced service performance. These changes also called for a response from Czech manufacturing companies operating in the B2B market. That is why they regularly evaluate and select their suppliers not only with respect to the quality of the raw materials and semi-finished products they supply, but also from the point of view of the quality of attached services. Similarly, suppliers are then evaluated by their customers with respect to the needs and requirements of all the subsequent segments, including end users.

Research in the area of service quality can be divided into five areas dealing with: the concept

and nature of service quality; strategic consequences of service quality; service quality assessment; analysis of the possibility of improving service quality, and effects of service quality on consumer behaviour (Perez, Abad, & Carillo, 2007).

This paper mainly deals with the area of service quality assessment. Therefore, a research into service quality in the B2B market conducted at a selected company engaging in manufacturing of non-woven textiles included our own research into closely interconnected topics in the area of customer satisfaction assessment in the automotive industry, where very high supply quality requirements are standard. The research included a study of a service quality assessment system in a part of the supply chain on the basis of evaluation of customer satisfaction with the given company with respect to the deciding parameters and methods of customer service quality assessment in the B2B market.

2. Aims and methodology

The paper mainly aims to identify the applied deciding parameters and methods of quality assessment of services attached to a product in the B2B market from the point of view of its customers. To meet this target, the paper first describes the basic service quality assessment methods on the basis of a professional literature review, and it identifies the service parameters applied in the B2B market.

Our own research was performed in the form of an analysis of delivered assessments of the given company from the point of view of satisfaction of its customers, applying our own personal experience acquired within surveys focussed on customer services conducted at a number of, mainly chemical, companies. The research was performed using the method of in-depth interviews with the sales manager on the basis of a questioning scenario. Directed interviews were conducted in 2017-8, mainly with the sales manager and the purchasing director of the given company.

The survey outcomes cover assessment of the given company by its customers within the supply system, the assessment methods applied in the practice of an industrial company, and particularly the applied service quality assessment parameters within the context of evaluation of customer satisfaction with the given supplier in the B2B market. Knowledge of these quality parameters and of the methods of the applied assessments makes it possible to seek ways to strengthening cooperation with the customers in the area of service quality enhancement. This should particularly result in an increase in corporate competitiveness in the B2B market and in maximization of the value created by the entire supply system

3. Customer service quality in B2B market

The abstraction of the service quality concept is the cause of its unclear definition. A lot of companies have difficulty describing exactly what customer services mean and defining them meaningfully (Lisch, 2014). The thing is that it is not possible to find a simple way how to specify all activities coming under B2B customer services in general The range of services and assessment of their importance when serving customers is affected by the type of the sold product, the way of storing, packaging, and transport, and also whether the sale is implemented in the domestic or foreign markets, the volume of sales, the range of the supplied production, the number of customers and their importance for the company (Vlckova & Lostakova, 2017).

3.1. Parameters of service quality

Service quality is defined e.g. as the difference between customer expectations and their perception of a provided service, where it is presumed that the customer's opinion about service quality has been created on the basis of the service they have been provided with (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). It is also defined as the difference between customer expectations relating primarily to the level of service provision, rather than to the encounter and interaction connected with the service, and the experience relating to purchase of the service (Seth, Deshmukh, & Vrat, 2006). It is also defined as the difference between customer expectations relating primarily to the level of service provision, rather than to the encounter and interaction connected with the service, and the experience relating to purchase of the service (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990). Service quality is closely relating to its provision, which takes place on the basis of interaction between the service provider and the service recipient. Most authors only focus on the recipient's perspective, and they ignore the provider's point of view. However, (Perez et al., 2007) point out that a significant aspect of service quality is based on the quality of relationships between the service provider and the service recipient.

Also, the quality parameters and the number of parameters are different. Their generally valid list cannot be created as they are not generally applicable. What is important is the fact that service quality is based on the customer's interaction with the product, and so the dimensions should be assessed with respect to the product type, the character of corporate activities and their orientation (Pulpanova, 2012). Service quality can be considered as a separate dimension or 3 dimensions: kindness to customers, tangibles, and confidence. While some authors define 5 service quality dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsibility, certainty, empathy and understanding (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Vastikova, 2014; Lostakova et al., 2017).

There is also a difference between European and North American approaches to service quality dimensions and to the way how they are measured. While the European approach includes physical quality, quality of interaction between the customer and the service provider, and quality of the company, the North American approach points out that there are few tangible elements in service offerings, and so they focus on intangible elements (Pulpanova, 2012). They were the basis for creation of SERVQUAL, SERPVPERF, and INDSERV tools for assessment of service quality from the point of view of the customer.

3.2. Service quality assessment methods

A validated instrument to measure the customer's perceptions about the service being delivered is crucial, especially since there is evidence which show that the customer's evaluation of service quality and the resulting satisfaction/ dissatisfaction is connected to repurchase, loyalty, and willingness to maintain a long-term relationship with the provider (Athanassopoulos, Gounaris, & Stathakopoulos, 2001) The customer evaluates services continuously on the basis of aspects occurring before, at the time of delivery, and after delivery of a service. Service quality assessment is connected with service quality measurement, i.e. assigning a value to a certain characteristic of an examined object providing we understand its interpretation (Wagner, 2009). Customers thus assess quality of services they have been provided with, and companies measure quality of services they provide on the basis of these assessments. Service quality assessment is related to customer expectations, and it is often connected with the level of customer satisfaction. Customers require that their needs are connected at two levels: satis-

faction with a product or a service that are the basis of the company's business activities, and satisfaction with service quality (Lostakova et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important for companies to determine the level of service quality through indicators, and to deal with service quality assessment methods from the point of view of the customer.

Service quality indicators represent an objective assessment of the quality of corporate services. They are based on description of events, and they measure supplier abilities. In view of the diversity of provided services, their significance, contents, their place in the system, the type of the assessed activity, etc., it is beneficial to divide service level indicators in accordance with the fact whether they characterize the scope of services or their quality (Gros, Barancik, & Cujan, 2016). Indicators of the scope of services are mainly used for proposing performance of individual supply system segments, see more e.g. in (Gros et al., 2016; Gros & Grosova, 2012).

Service quality indicators are used for assessment of the quality of a particular supplier in comparison with the competitors' offerings. (Gros & Grosova, 2012) summarized them and classified them into eight groups: indicators of service availability and completeness; service swiftness; service flexibility; service reliability; service frequency; information support of services; quality of after-sales services, and complaint settlement indicators.

Some companies determine a customer service level index, which depends on timeliness of a delivery, its completeness and flawlessness. If the resulting index equals 100%, it is a so-called "perfect delivery". This analysis is performed on the level of individual customers, according to distribution channels, regions, etc. (Christopher, 2011).

Researchers have devised and examined various instruments to measure perceived service quality. Most of the research has focused on measuring service quality in the consumer sector and particularly using the SERVQUAL scale as developed and subsequently modified by (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1994) or some variation (Gounaris, 2005)

The basis of SERVQUAL (service + quality) is a paradigm of the conflict between the customers' ideas and the service they are actually provided with (Parasuraman et al., 1994). Assessment itself is based on a GAP model. Gaps are given by the difference between the customer

expectations and perception of the provided service, which then results in the customer perception of service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

A comprehensive set of service attributes has been developed for such assessment (Parasuraman et al., 1994), marked as a scale of 21 items determining service quality (Kotler & Keller, 2012). They are also sometimes summarized under the abbreviation RATER: reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, responsiveness (Schuller & Rasticova, 2013). Individual attribute items are arranged in the way they are of a universal character, i.e. it is possible to use them for measuring service quality both in B2B and in B2C markets. Nevertheless, companies have to modify the attributes according to the character of their activities. Respondents from B2B market companies from different industries then confirmed effectiveness of two attributes. The first one is tangibles, and the second one empathy, certainty, reliability, and responsiveness (Ladhari, 2009).

Service quality is assessed through a questionnaire, where the customer evaluates, using a 7-point scale (Lish, 2014) 21 items of the SERVQUAL tool separately for expectations and for perception of the provided service. Not only due to the effort to create a universal tool, SERVQUAL faces a lot of criticism, which has been summarized e.g. by (Buttle, 1996), and it is considered more suitable for the B2C market rather than for the B2B market, where it requires significant modifications (Gounaris, 2005). Nevertheless, SERVQUAL should be able to help companies to identify areas where service quality is insufficient to make it subsequently possible for them to introduce innovations leading to improvements in service quality.

Another tool for service quality assessment has been created and tested by (Cronin & Taylor, 1992) who named it SERVPERF(service + performance). It is based on performance only. In other respects, it is based on the same concept, the same attributes and items as SERVQUAL. Unlike SERVQUAL, customers only evaluate perception, or service performance, which they have encountered. Thanks to this, data collection is less demanding. It takes half as much of the customer's "time" to fill in the questionnaire, and so the answers can be more reliable (Adetunji & Yadavalli, 2013). Application of SERVPERF in the B2B market again requires significant modifications, and so it is also considered a tool more suitable for service quality assessment in the B2C market rather than in the B2B market.

3.3. Customer service quality in B2B market

Differences between B2B and B2C markets also affect different concepts of services companies provide in these markets. Services provided in the B2B market require qualified staff, whose experience and skills are the keys to the quality of the provided service (Gounaris, 2005). These employees very often closely cooperate with their customers' corporate managers. Services provided in the B2B market are also much more complex and require administration of a larger number of parameters to ensure their flawless provision and achievement of a desired outcome (Jackson, Neidell, & Lunsford, 1995). A provided service is mostly specifically tailored to each customer. Therefore, it can be considered a unique solution to a specific problem (Gounaris, 2005). Service quality in the B2B market was first defined by Grönroos, according to whom service quality should be assessed from the point of view of the customer, and such assessment should cover both technical and functional quality (Grönroos, 1984):

- − technical quality refers to relatively measurable service elements the customers obtain in the course of their interaction with the service provider,
- − functional quality expresses how a customer service is provided.

(Szmigin, 1993) finds it difficult to perceive the difference between technical and functional service qualities, and so he considers it suitable to differentiate hard (technical), soft (functional), and output quality of the process of service provision, where he considers differences between them as unambiguous:

- − hard quality refers to what is performed during the process of service provision,
- − soft quality expresses how a service is performed in the course of its provision,
- − output quality differs from hard quality by the fact that although a company reaches excellent results in the area of hard quality, it does not necessarily achieve the desired target, i.e. output.

Grönroose was succeeded by (Morgan, 1991), who identified the following service quality dimensions:

- − process, evaluating how the customer perceives provision of a service within interaction with the service provider;
- − output, representing what the customer achieves thanks to the provided service.

For service quality assessment in the B2B market, Gounaris (2005) has created a new tool

and named it INDSERV (industry + service). He was inspired by the findings of authors who had been dealing with defining service quality in the B2B market, and he identified four quality dimensions:

- − potential quality – PTQ consisting of elements the customer takes account of when choosing a supplier. It is considered as primary entrance into the process of services (Lee, 2011);
- − hard process quality – HPQ referring to objective and task-oriented matters within a B2B delivery. It represents the process of service delivery (Lee, 2011);
- − soft process quality – SPQ evaluating e.g. approach of an employee, course of communication;
- − output quality – OQ, referring to a relative impact of supplier services on the customer's profitability, strategy, and ability to do business (Lee, 2011).

In total, INDSERV represents 22 statements relating to the supplier's company. For their overview, see e.g. (Gounaris, 2005). The customer evaluates individual statements in the same way as with the previous tools, i.e. through a questionnaire. According to the implicit conceptualization by Gounaris, output quality is the last dependent variable that is diversely affected by the other service dimensions, i.e. PQ, SPQ, and HPQ. Therefore, potential quality may influence output quality directly without using hard and soft process quality (Lee, 2011).

INDSERV is a relevant, valid, and reliable way which makes it possible for the company, on the basis of assessment made by the customers, to measure quality of services provided in the B2B market. Elements on the basis of which it was created depict unique aspects of services customers are provided with in the B2B market. Service providers can thus seek assessment made by their customers for each single question and determine areas requiring correction (Gounaris, 2005).

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Characteristics of a company from the point of view of service quality management

Company, a.s., a supplier whose assessments of customer services are being researched, has been a part of a foreign European group since its acquisition in 2004. The Group has about one thousand employees, and a little less than one third of them work at the given company. The Company supplies its products to processors mainly in the automotive industry, but also in the furniture, engineering, and chemical industries, and both to the domestic and to the European markets. The Group's vision includes creation of a high value for their customers and shareholders through innovative and cost-effective solutions, technological leadership, and top people.

In accordance with IATF 16949:2016 standard, which is an annex to ISO 9001:2015 standard, the customers are obliged to send the supplier assessment of their satisfaction. Certification of these standards is required in the entire supply chain of the automotive industry, so the given Company is obliged to evaluate its suppliers. Observance of ISO standards is checked by supervisory audit, which is performed annually. Recertification audit takes place once in three years.

Customer satisfaction assessment also includes evaluation of parameters relating to the quality of provided services, which are the subject matter of the research. What the Sales Manager mainly considers as beneficial to the Company is to identify and analyze service quality parameters the customers use for assessment, which means that they are important for them. Assessment also usually includes classification of the supplier into one of three groups (A, B, or C). Supplier A is a preferred supplier, whose performance meets the customer's requirements. Supplier B is an acceptable supplier, but a second choice. This supplier partially meets the requirements of the customer, who requires the supplier to use the assessment for improvements. Supplier C is an unacceptable supplier. Their performance is not acceptable and does not meet the customer's requirements. The customer requires urgent improvements and asks the supplier to send them a plan of remedial action leading to improvements.

As for the given Company, provision of high-quality services from the point of view of customers or suppliers mainly concerns the departments of sales, logistics, purchase, and marketing.

4.2. Analysis and discussion of outcomes

The analysis involved all 22 automotive customer satisfaction assessments sent to the Company in 2015–2016. It is a responsibility of the customers to decide whether to make assessment and to send it or not. Unless the Company receives assessment, it does not demand it. The Company did not receive these assessments to a large extent until 2015, and so it was not possible to analyze these assessments in time.

The analysis of all the provided assessments identified that each customer determines the form and method of assessment, the evaluated parameters or areas, and the way of sending by themselves. Assessments thus differ in the frequency of sending (some are sent monthly, some quarterly, and some biannually or annually), in the length and ways of marking of the assessed period (from 1 month to 1 year), and in the design of the assessment form, and particularly in its contents. When making assessment, the customers refer to performance specified by IATF 16949:2016 standard, where services like observance of the delivery time schedule are considered an essential part of assessment. This explains the identified certain similarity of some of the applied quality parameters. On the other hand, their diversity mainly relates to the customers' individual requirements and to different characteristics of their activities.

The customers are not obliged to specify the evaluated quality parameters in their assessments. However, most of the received assessments (14 out of 22) specify them at least partially. Four assessments only specify areas of assessment expressed as a percentage without detailed specification of the areas. For example, Assessment 1 evaluates the areas of quality, logistics, customer service, and the management system. However, from the mentioned areas it is not clear what exactly the customer evaluates. For example, in the area of quality, it is possible to evaluate service quality, product quality, certification, etc. In the area of the management system, the Company was assessed two points below the maximum possible assessment, but without specifying the reasons. It is not thus obvious from the assessment, what the company should improve to do better. As the Sales Manager explained, the reasons for losing points or % in assessment are only sought if an assessment results in classification into a supplier category that is lower than Category A. Four customers did not even specify the areas of assessment. They only specified classification of the Company into a supplier category. The reasons for occurrence of such "incompletely specified assessments" can be seen in the fact that each customer has to find not only the parameters that are suitable for assessment of their suppliers, but also their own methods of assessment of their suppliers. Therefore, it is an internal matter of each customer, their know-how, which they want to safeguard.

Provided services are not assessed by the customers separately, but they represent for them one of the principal areas for determination of their overall satisfaction with a supplier. Broadly speaking, customers' assessments specify their requirements concerning their suppliers within individual assessment parameters. The analysis of the contents of individual assessments and the directed interviews with the Sales Manager implies that it is very difficult to make aggregation of individual quality parameters as they are not specified in the assessments unambiguously. For example, most assessors understand the parameter "adherence to delivery times" and "adherence to quantities" as also their reliability. While one of the customers included these areas into a separate parameter of "delivery reliability", another customer included them into an aggregate area of logistics. Or, as for packaging quality, customers assess whether the Company has met their requirements concerning packaging, including ensuring packaging safety, or not. However, one of the customers has used it as a separate service quality parameter. A similar situation is e.g. with the parameters of customer service, staff helpfulness, swiftness of communication, and communication with the supplier, which overlap in individual assessments diversely. Therefore, it depends on the customer how it is important for them to point out any of the service quality parameters.

From the total number of 35 parameters applied within the customer satisfaction assessments, we have specified 15 parameters from the area of quality assessment of services supporting the product. These parameters, including relative frequency of their application in the assessments, are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Services supporting the product

Quality parameter	%
Adherence to delivery times	86
Adherence to quantities	64
Customer service	21
Complete documentation	21
Technical and safety data sheet	14
Swiftness of communication	14
Staff helpfulness	14
Packaging	14
Approach to solving stopped deliveries	14
Solving damages occurring in transit	7
Business terms and conditions (Incterms)	7
Delivery reliability	7
Logistics	7
Ensuring packaging safety	7
Communication with the supplier	7

Apparently, what the customers mainly consider as crucial when assessing service quality is service connected with delivery. In particular, it is reliability concerning adherence to delivery times and quantities, including delivery of the corresponding documentation and meeting the agreed Incoterms.

The second most frequently assessed group is parameters of services included in the area of customer services. Here the customers mainly assess service in the form of quality of communication with the customer, i.e. swiftness of communication, helpfulness of the staff, approach, mood and character of the person the customer is in contact with.

As for after-sales services, they mainly assess the approach to customer complaints and the course of settlement of a complaint that has been made. However, this assessed area also overlaps with the previously mentioned quality parameters, particularly in the area of swiftness of communication leading to remedial action. Complaints concerning timeliness of deliveries and the course of deliveries are very rare. Even so the Company opposes a half of the complaints about these services as they are mostly situations where customers unexpectedly change their requirements/order one day before delivery, and subsequently they are not satisfied with cooperation in the area of timely delivery. In the case of occurrence of a complaint, the customers initiate, by sending a so-called 8 D report to the supplier, taking remedial action, which will lead to identification and elimination of the causes of the failure. Through the parameter of remedial action, the customers then assess whether 8 D report was filled in and sent in time or not.

As for the point of view of the supplier concerning service quality, the Sales Manager can see a shortcoming in the missing automation system and insufficient electronization when communicating with the customer. Service provision is mostly communicated person-to-person through the back office. This might explain a lower assessment of the parameter of swiftness of communication by one of the customers, where the Company did not provide support immediately, but within 24 hours.

In the area of requirements concerning the level of quality management, the customers mostly focus on certification, where they assess the implemented quality certificates, i.e. ISO 9001:2015, IATF 16949:2016, and ISO 14001. As a supplier to the automotive industry, the Company is obliged to make D/TLD self-assessment,

and its timely sending is also a subject matter/parameter of assessment. In 2015, the failure to provide it resulted in the fact that the Company was classified by one of the customers at first into Group B, and after another three months without its delivery into Group C. The reason was the fact that the Company was unable to prove compliance with the requirements. Moreover, the Company did not have, as the Sales Manager said, sufficient IT infrastructure at that time. The customers also evaluate the use and security of software programs (SQA), e.g. program IMDS, which represents a database of materials and used raw materials. The provided and assessed service parameters may also include payment conditions, which are determined on an individual basis. For example, the customers assess the possibility of setting up self-billing arrangements with the supplier, or the parameters of partnerships and cooperation. Here, they assess whether the partnership with the Company contributes to development of the customer's company and to sharing information about its activities, results, etc. Another interesting assessed parameter is evaluation of the concord between the customer's attitude and the Company's attitude.

The methods of determining overall satisfaction with the Company as a supplier vary from customer to customer. The customers award the specified parameters or areas a certain weight and a maximum number of achieved points. However, most assessments do not include calculation of overall satisfaction. The analysis implies that the customers mostly express their overall assessment through the service level index. As an example, assessment can have the following form: overall satisfaction in % = (performance of deliveries × 0.5) + (quality × 0.40) + (others × 0.1).

The customer further divides the above mentioned three areas into partial criteria, but without further specification of performance of deliveries. They just state that only 100% delivery accuracy is acceptable for them. Unless it is so, the supplier is automatically classified into Group C and is required to deliver the remedial 8 D report within 10 business days of the delivery of the notice.

The customer finally assesses the Company 96%, which means Group B, and a lower assessment was awarded in the parameter "others" without specification of the reason. Nevertheless, the achieved result of 96% represents Group A to the other customers.

The range used by the customers for classification of their suppliers is very diverse. Only in one case it was identical in two customers, where

assessment of 90–100% meant classification into Group A, 75–89% into Group B, and 74% and less into Group C. The range for classification into Group A, which is most important for the Company, started at 60% (1 customer), but in the other 7 assessments it was 80%–100%). Two assessments specified point limits, i.e. on the basis of the sum of point averages acquired in the assessed areas. For Group A, these limits were 96–100 points and 14–16 points. Only one of the customers classifies their suppliers into Group D if they do not obtain more than 1 point out of 100. In the remaining 10 assessments, the limits for classification into groups were not specified at all.

In the monitored period, the Company was assessed, with the exception of the two cases discussed above, either as Supplier A, or verbally (in two cases). The thing is that these customers do not divide their suppliers into groups, but they only send them their result expressed as a percentage of the achieved performance with comments. Specifically, the comments were as follows: in the case of achieving 90% "You are one of the best, please follow the chosen way", and in the case of "Good job, please, analyse your mistakes to be first next time". As the Sales Manager stated, there has been an exceptional case where the Company was also classified into Group C because e.g. there was a breakdown of the line. In such a case, what is essential is swift communication with the customer and proposing a solution or an alternative delivery time.

5. Conclusion

The performed research implies that it is not possible to define service quality unambiguously. Authors who have tried to define service quality have identified different numbers of parameters, as well as their different designation. As service quality is based on customer-product interaction, it is suitable to define quality parameters depending on the product type and the character of corporate activity. It is important not to ignore the fact that service quality is closely relating to provision of a service, which takes place on the basis of interaction between the recipient and the provider. This was also proved by the performed analysis of the quality parameters in the sent customer satisfaction assessments. INDSERV is the most suitable tool for assessment of service quality in the B2B market from the mentioned tools. SERVQUAL and it modification SERVPERF would require further significant modification for application in the B2B market.

The research performed with the supplier in the automotive industry showed, on the basis of analysis of applied customer satisfaction assessment parameters, that each customer prefers different assessment parameters to which they also attribute different weights. Also, the assessment methods and the ranges for classification into supplier groups are very diverse. Satisfaction assessments necessarily include product quality, which is an essential but not sufficient prerequisite for the customer's interest in cooperation. From the total number of 35 parameters applied within the customer satisfaction assessments, we have specified 15 parameters from the area of quality assessment of services supporting the product. In general, quality parameters mainly refer to product supporting services, requirements concerning the level of quality management, and to development of cooperation.

The customers mainly consider as crucial when assessing service quality is reliability concerning adherence to delivery times and quantities, including delivery of the corresponding documentation, then communication with the customer, i.e. swiftness of communication, helpfulness of the staff, approach, mood and character of the person the customer is in contact with. The customers appreciate a comprehensive solution to their needs through offering goods, services relating to delivery and customer service, support, and expertise.

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