

Quality, professional delivery, service, and measurement - a reflection

by Mogens Lilleør

Quality

Craft production involves a work process that is relatively simple and straightforward, planning and implementation can be done by one or a few people as well as control of the product. When it comes to mass production, however, it is difficult to keep track of the overall work process, you might end up with a loss of overview that creates a need for another form of control of product, i.e. standards for what products should be able to do and an external control that measures whether the product meets the standard, so ...:

-> Quality can be understood as a relation between actual properties of the product and explicit requirements for it (standards).

Certain products are sold in markets under competitive conditions that has led the manufacturer to adapt to the customer's wishes. Thus, quality gets a subjective dimension as well. Quality is thus not just understood as an objective, measurable characteristic of a thing, i.e. a relation between actual properties and explicit requirements, but also as an experienced dimension of the customer who buy and use the thing, so ...:

-> Quality can be understood as a relation between the customer's experience of the product and the customer's expectations.

The concept of quality today therefore contains two aspects: a) Somewhat objective: That the product aligns with a certain standard. b) Somewhat subjective: The relationship between the customer's expectation and customer experience of the product.

Customer satisfaction and service

When the experience of the customer is included, it also matters how the product are delivered and serviced. Customer satisfaction is becoming an important measure of quality. And because customer satisfaction is emerging as part of the quality standard, a new type of delivery is evolving: Service. And as you know, customer satisfaction is not just depending on the product. Service production takes place in direct interaction with the customer: One successful visit at a restaurant is of course produced and delivered to a large extent by the chef in the restaurant kitchen and by the waiter in the proper physical setting, but it is also provided by the guest himself, e.g. by dress, behavior, mood, the conversation, the enjoying the meal etc. Restaurant visits are co-created.

The professional performance

With service created in the meeting between supplier and customer, service is similar to different types of professional services, e.g. the teacher's contribution to the teaching process or the social worker's contribution to the efforts of social work. The product itself, e.g. learning, evolve or happens as a result from the in-between of the professional and the pupil/citizen. The professional delivery is in this way a semi-manufactured or semi-finished product, which are

further processed in the interaction with the citizen. But often a professional delivery is more than that. It is double: its product intends to meet a need of the citizen, but it is often also a professional delivery to promote the citizen's own contribution to the production of the product. A good sign of quality is therefore also when teaching or social efforts promote the citizen's ability to contribute in a relevant way. This is very similar to service.

Of course, this way of thinking about quality calls for clarity on what professionals must deliver in such a dual perspective. What proportion of the product depends on the professional delivery?

Measurement

On what should we measure if we want to improve core delivery through measurement? A delivery consists of two dimensions: Some 'thing' such as a bath, a pension, a specific knowledge or method of calculation, a trash emptying, i.e. a thing-delivery. And then some 'process' in terms of action that mediates the recipient's relation to the 'thing'. In some cases, the 'thing' is the core delivery provided by the process, in other cases, the 'process' is the core delivery it-self, and then the thing is secondary. It can often be difficult to distinguish the two dimensions in a practice. But if you want to improve on a delivery by using measurement, then I think it is necessary to distinguish between the 'thing' of the service and its 'process' so that one can pose the right questions to open for improvement.

If it is about improving professional delivery, then the interest could be concerned about the process from the inside out: 1) the organization, workflows and collaboration. 2) the delivery in relation to the professional or political standard. 3) ordinary polite attentiveness, instructions or practical help etc. You can inquire about the process of production that creates the thing-delivery (1). One can ask about the thing-delivery itself (2). You can inquire about the process of delivering to the recipient (3).

One can also, outside in, ask about the recipient's experience of the thing-delivery or you can inquire about the recipient's experience of the process of delivering the thing. If the interest gathers around those questions, you can do user satisfaction survey. The problem might be that the citizen may not respond to the experience of the professional delivery as such, but to the experience of the product as a whole without being aware that he/she is co-creator. As an example: A product could be math skills at xx level: If the student does not learn the adequate mathematics, is it then because the teacher has not been prepared well, or the mathematical method is not good enough, or the pedagogy the teacher is applying is not good enough, or that the student has not been prepared well enough, or that the student did not participate enough?

One can of course ask further about the overall product or inquire into the recipient's own contribution, but I believe they may not be relevant if it is only about improving the professional delivery.