

DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT OF MZK TYCHY'S CUSTOMER SERVICE LEVEL

Krzysztof SKOWRON^{1*}, Daria CHEBA²

¹ Silesian University of Technology, Faculty of Organization and Management, Institute of Management, Administration and Logistics; krzysztof.skowron@polsl.pl, ORCID: 0000-0001-5458-6738

² Silesian University of Technology, Faculty of Organization and Management, Society of Administration; chebadaria@wp.pl

* Correspondence author

Abstract: This paper analyses the standard of MZK Tychy's customer service. The surveys were carried out among the users of the services provided by the above-mentioned transport services provider. The results of the analysis made it possible to formulate the following problems, indicated by the users of local transport: restrictions on the ticket distribution points, the impact of delays on abandoning the use of this means of transport, modernization of rolling stock, the issue of the quality and price of services.

Keywords: standard of customer service, quality of transport services, public transport.

1. Introduction

The analyses presented in this publication were performed during the implementation of the "Management methods and instruments impacting the development and modernity of cities and regions" (pol. „Metody i instrumenty zarządzania wpływające na rozwój i nowoczesność miast i regionów”) research project, registered under number 13/040/BK_18/0057, financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

Customer service is a crucial concept for manufacturers, distributors and service providers. It consists primarily in focusing on the customer and his/her needs. It is also connected with the willingness to discover what the customer's requirements are. Therefore, customer service should be seen as a skill or an ability to meet the customer's requirements and expectations.

Professional customer service and good customer relations require knowledge and understanding of customers' needs, especially since their exact expectations are not always known. Therefore, discovering what the customer requires makes it possible not only to understand them better, but also facilitates communication between the parties involved. It is important to provide information that the customer expects, and let them know where they can

find answers to questions they might have and how they can solve their problem or settle a matter. Moreover, it is the service provider who is responsible for solving the problems of the customer, who expects that all their questions and doubts will be settled or resolved by means of a full, exhaustive and credible answer. However, in addition to substantive needs, the customer expects a friendly attitude, respect, empathy, and a sense of justice and fairness. The customer is the one who matters most, and it is essential to evoke this feeling in every aspect. Therefore, working with a customer requires both professionalism, reliability and absolute compliance with the law, as well as an individual approach to the customer while maintaining impeccable manners and applicable ethical standards. It is a difficult task due to changing customer expectations and needs.

Modern customer service, if it is based on appropriate standards, makes a great impression on customers. Consequently, they are willing to buy goods or services again. A documented agreement containing technical specifications or other criteria, used consistently as rules or guidelines, constitutes a standard to provide assurance that the service meets the requirements and objectives of service providers and purchasers (Borowiec, and Michalski, 2014). Correctly defined standards become a valuable tool for customer service and influence its quality. From the customer's point of view, the quality is nothing more than the degree to which the requirements are met (Stoma, 2012). The higher the level, the greater the customer satisfaction becomes. Many terminological proposals for the concept of quality have already appeared in the literature (Beemer, and Shook, 2010). However, they share the common feature of placing the customer at the centre of attention (Hyken, 2011).

Public institutions, including institutions of public transport, serve the local community and should strive for a high level of the services provided. Their services are directed at the whole society, and therefore involve modern customer expectations, which are more difficult to meet due to the increased requirements and expectations of the service provided at the highest level, with equal treatment for each party involved. The correct definition of the customer and their needs affects the quality of service and guarantees fruitful cooperation (Leland, and Bailey, 1999; Kempny, 2001). Therefore, public transport services must adapt to the needs of the modern customer, who is increasingly aware of their rights and obligations.

The customer is any person who wishes to purchase any product or service. In a broad sense, the customer may also be a person served in an office or institution, even though there is often no direct payment for the service. Customers of this type are often referred to as petitioners (Chwałek, 2011; Performance Research Associates, 2015). Every person acts as a customer in their everyday life because functioning in society is based on purchasing goods and services. Customers require professionalism from the service providers. A professional is a person who recognises customer service as a profession that is best performed when customer needs are understood and the best ways to satisfy them are discovered. A customer who leaves with a negative experience and a bad impression has a tendency to share it with multiple people, leading to the "ripple effect", whereby a bad opinion about the company spreads faster than

a good one. It is understandable that a dissatisfied customer has more anger and energy which they are willing to expend by using every opportunity to talk about poor quality of service (Sobczak-Matysiak, 1997; Blanchard, 2016). This is the reason why customer service is so important, regardless of whether it involves a public or a private institution. The broadly defined perception of other people (customers), their mental states and characteristics, is constantly performed during the process of interaction with them. It is an extremely important interpersonal skill to notice a person's behaviour and understand the reasons behind it, and their effects on interpersonal relationships (Sobczak-Matysiak, 1997; Kumar, 2010).

The broadly-understood customer service applies to various types of customers. These include both individual and institutional customers. The principle of due service applies regardless of the type of customer encountered in a given situation. It is important to be able to discern between them. An individual customer is a person who buys goods and services on the market, and makes decisions independently, on their own behalf and with their own money, whereas an institutional customer is any type of enterprise, organization, or state or local government institution which, upon purchasing goods or services on the market, is represented by accordingly authorised persons acting on its behalf and with the use of its financial resources (Chwałek, 2011).

It should be mentioned that the relations between transport services providers and citizens have undergone a profound transformation throughout history. The consequence of the new approach lies in recognising their needs and conducting all activities in such a way as to satisfy those needs. The citizen changes their status from a petitioner at the mercy of the transport services provider to a "co-producing" customer whose opinion influences the shape of the service (The Chancellery of the Prime Minister, 2012). Human needs are very complex. Therefore, in order to serve a customer in a professional manner it is necessary to remember that their needs arise from all levels and constitute the result of their desires, aspirations, dreams and preferences, closely related to their expectations towards the service provider, from establishing contact to satisfying their needs. As part of the contact, it is possible not only to satisfy the needs already felt by the customer, but also create new ones (Kasprzak, 2010).

Customer services is a process which is primarily based on all kinds of contact between the people offering or selling certain goods or services and the people interested in purchasing those goods and services. This contact may be direct, in which case it usually takes the form of a conversation, presentation, demonstration, or any verbal exchange of thoughts or ideas related primarily to the needs of the people served. They can also be indirect, whereby they take place by means of communication, such as phone or radiotelephone, or exchange of correspondence via post, fax or the Internet (Chwałek, 2011). Customer service consists in understanding who the customer is, what they think and feel, what irritates or annoys them, what satisfies them, what their expectations and needs are, and finding the best way to satisfy them (Sobczak-Matysiak, 1997).

2. Methods

The main objective of the conducted research is the diagnostic assessment of the customer service standards at MZK Tychy, including a detailed analysis of the opinions of people using the services provided by the above-mentioned transport services provider.

The Municipal Transport Authority in Tychy (pol. Miejski Zarząd Komunikacji w Tychach – MZK Tychy) was created as an entity financed by the City of Tychy under Resolution No. 372 of the City Council of Tychy of 12 September 1996. Since 30 October 2008, it has acted as a budgetary unit. It is directly supervised by the Mayor of Tychy. The unit deals with organising public transport and, above all, creating timetables, controlling the quality of services offered, collecting service fees from the passengers, and concluding contracts with companies which offer passenger transport services. Its range encompasses Tychy and 16 other municipalities (including, e.g. Mikołów and Orzesze) (The Municipal Transport Authority in Tychy, 2018).

The following research problems were adopted in order to complete the main research objective:

- determining how the limited number of tickets at points of sale affects the quality of customer service,
- determining whether delays in public transport affect the quality of customer service,
- analysing whether MZK cares for the continuous development and quality of its offer,
- analysing the level of satisfaction with MZK's offer among passengers from outside Tychy,
- determining whether the fare is adequate to the level of services provided,
- analysing whether the information available at stops is optimal for travellers.

The following research hypotheses were adopted in the study:

- H₁: The limited number of tickets available at points of sale discourages the use of services provided by MZK Tychy.
- H₂: Delays in public transport affect the abandonment of services provided by MZK Tychy.
- H₃: MZK introduces modern solutions which improve the quality and functionality of the services.
- H₄: Customers from outside the City of Tychy are less satisfied with the services than the residents of Tychy.
- H₅: The fare is adequate to the level of services provided by MZK Tychy.
- H₆: The availability and transparency of information are satisfactory for travellers.

The study used both original (survey) and secondary (internal materials) data sources. The surveyed group consisted of travellers from the City of Tychy and neighbouring towns.

The research tool used in order to conduct the research was a questionnaire consisting of 30 questions which are both open-ended and semi-closed. The survey was anonymous, and the respondents were selected at random. The survey contains mandatory demographic questions (1-4). They describe the respondent's gender, age, place of residence and status. The general questions (5-6) were designed to determine how often the respondent travels with MZK Tychy and whether they were satisfied with its services. The next questions may be described as detailed – they focus on specific questions and issues which directly concern the topic under research and will serve as the basis for formulating the most important conclusions for the project. Questions 7-9 determine the impact that the lack of access to tickets has on the passengers, while questions 10-14 focus on the impact of delays on abandoning the services. The next questions (15-16) concern the noticeability of changes in quality and additional services offered by MZK Tychy. These questions were designed to demonstrate how the passengers react to the introduced innovations and how noticeable those innovations are. Questions 18-23 apply to passengers who use MZK Tychy outside the main area of its operation. They serve the purpose of verifying whether or not the services offered by MZK Tychy in smaller towns differ significantly from the standards existing in large cities. Questions 24-29 concern solely the quality and price of the services offered. These questions include issues related to cleanliness, driving culture and safety. Questions 17 and 30 involve the issue of access to information. Based on these questions, it can be determined whether the information provided by the facility is transparent and comprehensible for passengers. A part of the survey, including questions 7-23 and 30, responds to the hypotheses put forth in the project. It determines their accuracy by presenting the attitude of passengers towards individual issues.

3. Analysis of empirical studies

The study proper was preceded by a pilot study on 3 and 6 November 2017. A group of 60 respondents participated in the study. It was carried out in Tychy and Katowice. The main objective of the study was to verify the correctness of the study procedure, as well as to receive comments and requests concerning the structure and substantive scope of the questionnaire. The respondents showed great interest in the subject, answered the questions with ease, expressed satisfaction with the very fact of conducting the survey, and were extremely interested in the results. The respondents did not indicate any difficulties when filling out the questionnaires; however, it was pointed out that questions 3, 6, 10, 12 and 13 did not include a sufficient number of optimal answers.

The study proper, conducted with a sample of 320 respondents, took place between 23-26 November 2017.

380 respondents participated in the conducted studies. Each time, the respondents were inhabitants of the Śląskie Province; 53.1% were women (202 people) and 46.9% were men (178 people). The age distribution among the respondents was as follows: 6.3% (24 people) were in the age group below 18 years of age. 46.9% (178 people) belonged to the age group 18-25 years of age, 34.2% (139 people) were 26-35 years of age, 6.3% (24 people) were in the age group 36-55 years of age, and 6.3% (24 people) were in the age group 56-66 years of age. None of the respondents was older than 66 years of age. The respondents' places of residence were as follows: 25% (95 people) – village, 15.6% (59 people) – town of up to 50,000 inhabitants, 37.6% (143 people) – town between 50,000-100,000 inhabitants and 21.8% (83 people) – city with over 100,000 inhabitants. Taking into account the social status of the respondents, it can be noted that 37.3% (142 people) were school/university students, 46.9% (178 people) were employed, 9.5% (36 people) were unemployed, and 6.3 (24 people) were pensioners.

Table 1.
Distribution of answers to question 5 (in [%])

		<i>I don't use it</i>	<i>Very rarely</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Quite often</i>	<i>Very often</i>
5	How often do you use the services of MZK Tychy?	6.2	28.1	21.9	25	18.8

Source: author's own study.

Table 2.
Distribution of answers to question 6 (in [%])

		<i>Yes</i>	<i>Quite</i>	<i>I don't have an opinion</i>	<i>Not really</i>	<i>No</i>
6	Are you satisfied with the quality of services provided by MZK Tychy?	31.3	28.1	23.1	8.7	8.8

Source: author's own study.

Table 3.
Distribution of H1 answers (in [%])

		<i>Definitely yes</i>	<i>Perhaps</i>	<i>It's hard to say</i>	<i>Not really</i>	<i>Definitely no</i>
7	Have you encountered a situation where there were no MZK Tychy tickets available at a point of ticket sale (e.g. newsstand).	21.9	40.6	0	0	37.5
8	Have you ever wished to buy a ticket from an MZK Tychy bus driver, but the tickets turned out to be unavailable?	15.6	53.1	0	0	31.3
9	Have you ever chosen a different mode of transport due to a problem with the availability of tickets at points of sale?	25	0	0	0	75

Source: author's own study.

When analysing the distribution of answers to questions verifying the first research thesis, it can be noted that despite the fact that more than half of the people participating in the questionnaire had dealt with a lack of availability of tickets, as many as 75% of them did not decide to choose another means of transport. Their choice might be influenced by the fact that younger people with no driver's licence, for whom evading fares does not pose a problem, constituted a large part of the respondents. It can therefore be concluded that the first research hypothesis H₁: "The limited number of tickets available at the points of sale discourages the use of services provided by MZK Tychy" has been verified as negative.

Table 4.*Distribution of H2 answers (in [%])*

		<i>Definitely positively</i>	<i>Quite positively</i>	<i>It's hard to say</i>	<i>Rather negatively</i>	<i>Definitely negatively</i>
10	How do you assess the punctuality of the public transport organised by MZK Tychy?	<i>34.4</i>	<i>15.6</i>	<i>34.4</i>	<i>12.5</i>	<i>3.1</i>
11	Is it often the case that your target mode of transport arrives late?	<i>18.8</i>	<i>43.8</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>31.3</i>	<i>6.1</i>
12	Have you ever arrived late to an important event due to a delay in public transport?	<i>43.8</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>28.1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>28.1</i>
13	Did you decide to file a complaint in that situation?	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>100</i>
14	Have you ever changed the mode of transport because the bus was delayed?	<i>31.3</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>6.2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>62.5</i>

Source: author's own study.

The conducted research confirmed hypothesis H₂: Delays in public transport affect the abandonment of services provided by MZK Tychy. The survey shows that delays have a greater impact on abandoning the services provided by MZK than the limited availability of tickets. This may result from frustration, as almost 44% of the respondents had not made it to an important event due to delays in the timetable. Keeping that in mind, travellers will think twice before choosing the services of MZK Tychy.

Table 5.*Distribution of H3 answers (in [%])*

		<i>Yes</i>	<i>It's hard to say</i>	<i>No</i>
15	Have you noticed a change in the quality of services offered by MZK Tychy?	<i>15.6</i>	<i>28.1</i>	<i>56.3</i>
16	Do you use additional services provided by MZK Tychy? - "EKO BILET" [ECO TICKET] - "Ginger" - "Kiedy przyjedzie" [When will it arrive] - "moBILET" [Mobile Ticket] - I don't use it		<i>3.1</i> <i>0</i> <i>21.9</i> <i>12.5</i> <i>62.5</i>	

Source: author's own study.

Changes introduced by MZK Tychy are hardly visible. Of those taking part in the survey, less than 16% had noticed an improvement in the functionality of MZK services. Oddly enough, most of them – as many as 62.5% – do not use the additional services provided by MZK Tychy. This is surprising given the fact that most of the respondents were young people who, as a rule, quickly adapt to new technologies and are willing to try out new, convenient solutions. Taking into account the above data, hypothesis H₃: MZK introduces modern solutions which improve the quality and functionality of the services – can be refuted.

Table 6.

Distribution of H4 answers (in [%])

		Yes	It's hard to say	No
18	Do you use the offer of MZK Tychy outside Tychy?	50	25	25
		Several times a week	Several times a month	Several times a year
19	How often do you use the offer of MZK Tychy when travelling outside Tychy?	20	44	36
		Good	Average	Bad
20	Is the timetable offered by MZK Tychy satisfactory?	32	56	12
		Yes, often	Occasionally	No
21	Has your bus ever arrived late?	52	32	16
22	Has your bus ever failed to arrive at the bus stop?	16	64	20
		Definitely yes	It's hard to say	Definitely no
23	Is the offer of transport services providers in other regions richer and better suited for travellers?	36	52	12

Source: author's own study.

Upon analysing the distribution of answers to questions 18-23, it can be noted that the majority of the respondents use the services of MZK Tychy both in and outside the city. Customers did not notice any difference in the quality of services between regions. A large part of travellers outside the area of Tychy were as satisfied with MZK services as people from other regions. This is an unexpected result since the smaller number of bus lines or longer journeys should negatively impact the way the offered services are received. Despite the fact that the offer is significantly poorer in terms of its range and additional services, only 36% of the

respondents believe that the journeys should be refined and improved. Thus, hypothesis H₄: Customers from outside the City of Tychy are less satisfied with the services than the residents of Tychy – can be refuted.

Table 7.

Distribution of H5 answers (in [%])

		Yes	It's hard to say	No
24	Do you think that the fares offered by MZK Tychy are adequate to the level of services provided?	37.5	46.9	15.6
25	Are the buses up to an adequate standard?	56.3	34.4	9.3
26	Are the means of transport maintained in a clean condition?	50	43.8	6.2
27	Are the manners and behaviour of the drivers satisfactory?	56.3	40.6	3.1
28	Are the waiting conditions at the stops satisfactory?	46.9	34.4	18.7
29	Do you feel safe while travelling with MZK Tychy?	40.6	56.3	3.1

Source: author's own study.

Upon analysing the distribution of questions concerning the quality and price of the services offered, and issues related to cleanliness, driving culture and traveller safety, it can be concluded that hypothesis H₅: The fare is adequate to the level of services provided by MZK Tychy – has been confirmed.

Table 8.

Distribution of H6 answers (in [%])

		Yes	It's hard to say	No
17	Is the availability of information concerning the timetable organised by MZK Tychy adequate?	53.2	40.7	6.1
30	Is the information at the bus stops legible and comprehensible?	65.6	28.1	6.3

Source: author's own study.

Hypothesis H₆: The availability and transparency of information are satisfactory for travellers – has also proven to be correct, as more than half of the respondents were satisfied with the availability of information regarding the timetable, and over 65% of them believed that the information is comprehensible. Only a few respondents believed that the information should be clearer.

4. Summary

The main objective of the conducted research was the diagnostic assessment of the customer service standards at MZK Tychy, including a detailed analysis of the opinions of people using the services provided by the above-mentioned transport services provider, performed during the

implementation of the "Management methods and instruments impacting the development and modernity of cities and regions" (pol. „Metody i instrumenty zarządzania wpływające na rozwój i nowoczesność miast i regionów”) research project, registered under number 13/040/BK_18/0057, financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. Its implementation was based on the following research problems: determining how the limited number of tickets at points of sale affects the quality of customer service, determining whether delays in public transport influence the quality of customer service, analysing whether MZK Tychy cares about the continuous development and quality of its offer, analysing the satisfaction level for MZK passengers outside the area of Tychy, determining whether the fare is adequate to the level of services provided, and analysing whether the information at the stops is optimal for travellers.

This served as the basis for research on the implementation of the stated objective, and by analysing the material obtained the following can be concluded: most of the respondents had a positive image of MZK Tychy's facilities. Its services are used by people of various ages, but they are mostly young people (up to 25 years of age). Customers appreciate the punctuality and cleanliness of the vehicles, and the prices of services offered. Unfortunately, the study shows that a considerable number of the respondents had encountered a situation where tickets were unavailable for purchase (both from the driver and at the shop). It is a problematic situation, especially at night, when newsstands are closed and the driver is out of tickets. Ticket vending machines are also not available at every spot. Having no other means of transport to choose from, the passenger is therefore forced to evade fares in order to reach their destination. It is also important that half of the respondents do not use the additional services offered by MZK Tychy. However, it is difficult to unambiguously determine what exactly may be the reason for such behaviour. Elderly people may be suspicious of new, additional offers, or accustomed to the traditional, regular forms of paying for tickets. Furthermore, not all passengers have phones capable of running an application which enables such services.

Taking into account the collected information, the following changes in the area of MZK Tychy's customer service standards can be proposed:

1. Increasing the number of ticket vending machines. There should be at least one per stop to ensure passenger freedom and peace of mind in relation to ticket purchase.
2. It is advisable to examine the situation related to potential passengers' lack of interest in additional services. The situation must be carefully analysed, and it must be decided whether the additional offers should be withdrawn, reduced or modified. It is also recommended to advertise additional offers by means of leaflets at newsstands (located next to stops), or on posters or stickers.

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