

FOCUS

A UITP POSITION PAPER

Quality as a means of reconciling individual needs with the collective challenges of sustainable development

Why improve quality? Challenges and definitions

The only reasonable way in which to reconcile individual aspirations and the collective will, concepts which are basically contradictory, is to provide public transport services of the highest possible quality ...

When faced with the necessity to travel, an individual's natural desire is for a personal mode of transport that is flexible, independent and that is perceived as fast.

A community has the mission of promoting quality of life and mobility for all by developing a sustainable city. Within this objective, it has to develop collective transport modes that allow mobility to grow and contribute to the region's economic vitality. The unrestricted use of individual transport soon reaches its limit in terms of the consumption of available journey space.

The only reasonable way in which to **reconcile individual aspirations and the collective will**, concepts which are basically contradictory, is to provide public transport services of the highest possible quality in a way that will persuade a large number of inhabitants to resist the temptation to use individual modes, to give public transport a try and become regular public transport users. At the same time, politicians are more likely to take decisions in favour of high-quality public transport.

Furthermore, increased liberalisation in the public transport market demands that each operator constantly improves services in order to be able to perform in a competitive market.

This orientation towards a high-quality service presupposes a deep overhaul of the mission of public transport operators and their internal management. Mass transit carriers, particularly during peak periods, must be aware of the changing expectations of the population in order to transform themselves into a profession that provides attractive mobility services. The involvement of staff in the implementation of such actions is likely to foster genuine feelings of pride among them vis-à-vis their company and their work.

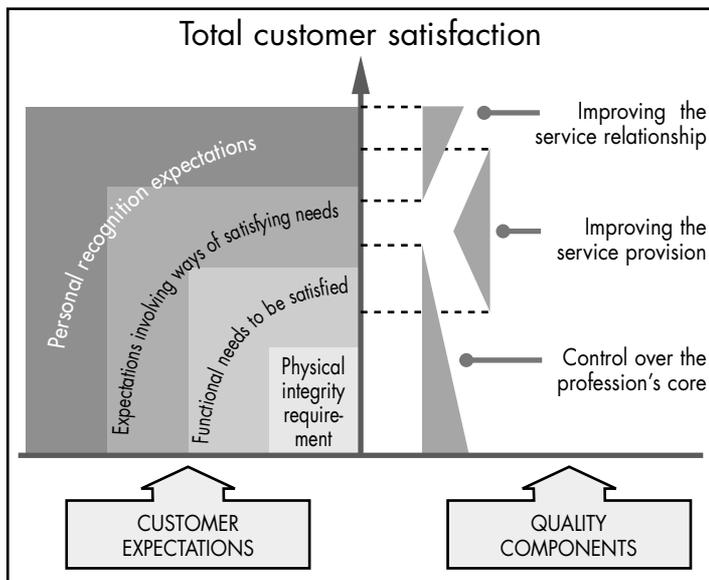
This is an official position of UITP, the International Association of Public Transport. UITP has over 2000 members in 80 countries throughout the world and represents the interests of key players in this sector. Its membership includes transport authorities, operators, both private and public, in all modes of collective passenger transport, and the industry. UITP addresses the economic, technical, organisation and management aspects of passenger transport, as well as, the development of policy for mobility and public transport world-wide.

The improvement of quality presents positive stakes for all the parties concerned: the public authority, the clients, the operators and their agents. Any such action to improve quality naturally comes at a price for all actors. However, it must be seen as an investment whose beneficial spin-offs for the community, passengers and operators will easily justify the commitment.

Quality: what is it?

Without seeking to propose a single definition of quality, some generally accepted assertions allow a definition of quality to be constructed that is also applicable to the public transport sphere:

- Quality is saying what is going to be done, doing what has been said, and constantly checking that what has been done is in keeping with what has been said.
- Quality is a managerial step aimed at constantly improving services and the processes of delivering of these services.
- Quality aims to improve customer satisfaction with a view to retaining their loyalty and making them service consumers.



For the customer, service quality is everything. Approaches in the past that entailed favouring (indeed even opposing) one particular aspect of service quality or another - punctuality, safety, customer service – overlooked this basic overall customer expectation. In the transport sphere like any other, quality has to take account of service’s every dimension.

In our view, quality begins with safety and reliability, continues with service provision corresponding to the expectations of passengers, and is only complete if, in particular, the service relationship is improved from person to person, i.e. between our staff and our customers. These various aspects of quality do not compete with one another, but contribute together to quality as perceived by passengers.

¹ For more information, see UITP Vademecum on Total Quality Management, available in May 2003

How to pursue a quality approach within a public transport system?¹

Thanks to its professionalism, the company has control on numerous aspects of service quality but it can not master all the processes enabling to ensure quality of all aspects of the service provision. The quality system must be defined and implemented by all the participants.

Therefore quality must be implemented in a “contract and partnership” based approach:

- Contract based: Between the public authority and the operators, for the aspects which depend on the operators and on the authorities. The contracts can contain financial incentives for improvement.
- Partnership based: For all the aspects which require the involvement of several actors.

The quality system is a tool that allows each of the partners to position themselves as part of the same action.

A quality approach cannot be implemented without knowing the quality expected by the customers; not the utopian quality that they might dream about outside the specific context, nor contrarily the quality they expect to encounter objectively during their next journey, but the service that customers see as legitimate and normal. The expression of this expected quality means that all the actors have to view the services through customer's eyes.

Desired quality expresses local authority's and operator's ambitions in terms of service. Allowing for customer expectations and, at the same time, the strategic choices made by actors, it is expressed in terms of expected results for the customer. It is the commitment made by actors with regard to the service to be provided.

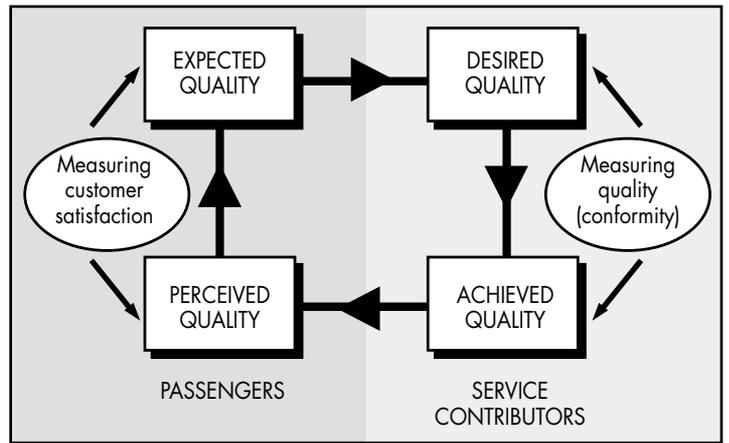
Achieved quality results from actions taken by the contributing parties (operators, local authority, etc.). The gap between desired quality and achieved quality is a reflection of transport system performance and the system's capacity to achieve its objectives.

Ultimately, customers have their own perceptions of the service we offer them. This is perceived quality. The gap between perceived quality and achieved quality makes it possible to assess customer satisfaction, which is the overriding objective of our quality actions.

The fundamental component of action is therefore a detailed definition of the quality desired by customers and its expression in terms of results for the clients. Desired quality is what makes it possible to devise managerial tools and partnerships for improving quality and also to assess the system's performance.

The benefit of this approach - definition of service, measurement of the results - is that it spans all responsibility and service-production levels.

For example, staff on a particular line, at a particular station or interchange, or in an inspection team, will all construct and use the same tools as those used at the transport system level, thereby ensuring total consistency.



Quality and certification:

There are numerous tools for driving quality actions, in particular the various forms of ISO certification and service certificates based on the CEN 13816 standard.

Certification is a possible means of taking the company forward, depending on the distinctive culture of each company or business sector concerned. Technical sectors are more often interested in and mobilised by ISO initiatives, and operational sectors by result certificates.

One particular source of enhanced value and progress is the recognition of the professionalism of staff by an inspection body from outside the company.

However, certification must be seen as a progress tool. There is danger that it will be made into an end in itself and that greater energy will be devoted to administering quality rather than improving it.

Quality is not a state that people are seeking to attain, but a path towards the constant improvement of our service.

The measurement and reporting of quality results, at all levels, are powerful tools for management and quality improvement.

Recommendations

- Since transport service quality, as perceived by passengers, depends on action by all transport system actors, UITP recommends that public authorities do the following:
 - Develop a quality approach based on a definition of the service that passengers want, expressed in terms of results for the travellers.
 - Integrate a quality approach within tendering and contract-awarding procedures.
 - Beyond contractual relationships with the operators, pursue the necessary partnerships for achieving quality results with all the concerned actors.
 - Implement their own quality actions.
- Since transport operators are one of the key actors in providing passenger service quality, UITP recommends to its members that they commit themselves to quality actions on their respective level and prioritise a customer-orientated approach.
This entails a redefinition of internal management featuring several crucial aspects:
 - Each member of staff is aware of the service that customers want.
 - Assessment and measurement of service quality represent an ongoing improvement tool to be used at every company level.
 - Internal co-operation is encouraged in order to allow everyone to contribute to the service objectives. An analysis of the processes of delivery of the services allows one to improve the internal co-operation and the economic performance of the company.
 - All staff is granted individual room for manoeuvre in which to adapt to specific situations within the framework of service objectives.
 - Senior management shows strong and lasting commitment and points the way forward to achieving service commitments.
- Since progress must be measured, UITP recommends that all public transport actors measure the differences between the desired service level and that which is being achieved. This measurement can be made in accordance with the recommendations contained in CEN standard 13816.

Under the patronage of the General Commission on Transport Management.